



# Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



THURSDAY — 31 MAR 2022

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## Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 Forecast: active Atlantic hurricane season</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/03/31/Accuweather-hurricane-season-forecast/5261648727363/">https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/03/31/Accuweather-hurricane-season-forecast/5261648727363/</a>
GIST	<p>The Atlantic hurricane season is two months away, with the official start arriving on June 1, but AccuWeather forecasters released predictions for the coming season this week, noting that there is a high chance for a preseason storm to develop and that another active tropical season is expected.</p> <p>AccuWeather forecasters emphasized that now is the time to prepare, especially since some communities are still recovering from devastating storms over the last couple of years.</p> <p>The past two hurricane seasons were extraordinarily active, as AccuWeather meteorologists predicted, with the historic 2020 season reaching unprecedented levels and setting a new record for the number of named storms with 30. The 2021 tropical year was almost as prolific with 21 named storms, making it the third most active on record in terms of named systems. It also forced meteorologists to use the entirety of the designated storm name list for the second straight season.</p> <p>Of course, the seasons prior to 2020 and 2021 certainly weren't underachievers, with the devastating trio of major hurricanes -- Harvey, Irma and Maria -- striking over a one-month stretch in 2017, and hurricanes Florence and Michael blasting parts of the Southeast in 2018. In fact, the last season with a below-normal number of named storms was 2015</p> <p>So what can residents living in hurricane-prone areas of the United States expect in 2022? More of the same, unfortunately.</p> <p>AccuWeather's team of tropical weather forecasters, led by veteran meteorologist and hurricane expert Dan Kottlowski, is once again predicting an above-normal season in terms of tropical activity in the Atlantic, as well as a higher-than-normal chance that a major hurricane could make landfall in the mainland United States, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.</p> <p>Specifically, Kottlowski's team is forecasting 16-20 named storms and six to eight hurricanes. Of those hurricanes, about three to five are forecast to reach major hurricane status, which occurs when a storm reaches Category 3 strength with winds exceeding 111 mph or higher.</p> <p>AccuWeather's forecast of 16-20 named storms is higher than the 30-year average of 14 per year, while the projection of six to eight hurricanes is about in line with the normal of seven. It's also nearly identical to how 2021 played out. Last year, the 21 named storms included seven hurricanes and four major hurricanes. Eight of those storms made a direct impact on the United States. About four to six direct impacts are predicted for 2022.</p> <p>In order to make such a long-range prediction, Kottlowski's team studied a number of current weather trends, past hurricane seasons and climatological models to help piece together this meteorological puzzle. Here's a deeper look at how several influential factors will shape the 2022 season.</p>

The climatological phenomenon known as La Niña can help shape weather patterns worldwide, and in particular, play a major factor in how active a hurricane season can become.

La Niña is part of a three-pronged climatological pattern known as the El Niño Southern Oscillation, which is a short-term climate fluctuation that is determined by the warming or cooling of the waters in the equatorial Pacific Ocean.

When sea-surface temperatures are anomalously warm in this part of the Pacific, and stay that way over a period of 12-18 months, climate experts say an El Niño phase is underway. When the reverse is true, and water temperatures are lower than average, a La Niña phase is declared. The third phase, ENSO-neutral, is when water temperatures are around average.

#### Wind Shear Weakens Tropical Systems

When a La Niña phase is present, as was the case in the past two extremely active years, the amount of vertical wind shear in the atmosphere can be limited as westerly winds typically stay farther to the north and away from the tropical Atlantic. An abundance of vertical wind shear, which typically occurs over the Atlantic during El Niño patterns, can often stymie burgeoning tropical cyclones or limit their development altogether.

As of Wednesday, Kottowski, who has been with AccuWeather for more than four decades, says a weak La Niña is in place and it is expected to persist through the beginning of the tropical season. With less wind shear in the atmosphere, there will be one fewer tropical hindrance in play. Kottowski noted that a shift to a neutral phase could occur during the summer, but if La Niña remains in place, or even intensifies, then it's possible that there could be more than 20 storms, he said.

If more than 21 storms end up taking shape, that means forecasters will have exhausted the designated storm list for the third consecutive year and will have to use a supplemental list for any additional storms that develop. The first three storms that form in the Atlantic this year will be named Alex, Bonnie and Colin.

The status of La Niña throughout the summer will be closely monitored by meteorologists. If the La Niña phase ends up fading away over the summer or early in the fall, the tropical activity could wind down well before the official end of the season on Nov. 30.

Tropical depressions or storms have gotten a jump start on the official June 1 start date in the Atlantic for seven consecutive seasons, which has caused the National Hurricane Center to consider moving the season's start date to May 15.

Kottowski said that in addition to the presence of La Niña, above-normal sea-surface temperatures in key tropical development regions will result in a higher-than-normal chance of preseason development for the eighth year in a row. Temperatures were already above normal in many areas that meteorologists closely scrutinize for tropical systems during late March.

"Sea-surface temperatures are above normal over much of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean and even off the East Coast of the United States, especially the southeast coast of the United States, and these are critical areas for early season development," Kottowski said. This includes much of the central Atlantic, the chunk of the ocean forecasters refer to as the main development region, he added.

Sea-surface temperatures near Key West, Fla., were about 76-78 degrees as of Monday, which is about 1.6 to 3.8 degrees Fahrenheit above normal.

Warmer-than-normal waters in March often indicate areas in the basin will be sufficiently warm for tropical development by the start of the hurricane season, Kottowski said.

Waters are cooler in the eastern Atlantic and toward the coast of Africa, but meteorologists expect that the waters will be sufficiently warm enough in that part of the basin by the peak of the season in middle to late August.

Speaking of Africa, the weather on the northwestern part of the continent will also help shape the 2022 season.

Forecasters expect strong winds over Africa to produce frequent tropical waves later in the season. These tropical waves rumble across the Sahara Desert in northern Africa and into the open Atlantic where they can become better organized into tropical depressions or tropical storms.

Kottlowski has previously said that about 85 of all tropical storm development can be linked back to tropical waves, which are areas of low pressure in the atmosphere that are typically situated north to south and move westward from Africa into the Atlantic.

Forecasters determine the overall intensity of a hurricane season by a metric known as Accumulated Cyclone Energy, which accounts for the strength of a tropical system over its entire lifetime. In the past, a large volume of tropical storms in a season has not always generated a higher ACE value.

The 2021 season finished with an Accumulated Cyclone Energy value of 145 and 2020 had a total of 182. Both of those were extraordinarily active seasons that were above normal when measured by intensity. However, they still fall short of past seasons such as 2017 (225) and 2005 (245), according to Colorado State University figures.

AccuWeather meteorologists are projecting a total ACE in the range of 120-150 for the 2022 season. A value of 123 is considered to be normal.

Forecasters will often refer to analog years when putting together a hurricane season forecast. These data points are past seasons that featured weather patterns similar to the current and projected trends of ENSO.

Eight years bear striking similarities to this year, according to Kottlowski's research. Several of those most recent seasons include 2021, 2012 and 2001.

Kottlowski cautioned that just because a storm hit a certain part of the United States in a previous analog year, such as Hurricane Ida in Louisiana in 2021, Superstorm Sandy in New Jersey in 2012, or Hurricane Hugo in South Carolina in 1989, there is no implication that the same areas will be struck again this year. Conversely, areas that weren't impacted by landfalling storms in a given analog year, are not less likely to be impacted in 2022.

Based on those past landfall locations, the areas with the greatest potential for direct impacts along the mainland United States are the southeast Texas coast eastward through Florida, particularly the panhandle area, and the coast of the Carolinas.

One major player that is watched closely by meteorologists for determining how close to U.S. shores storms will approach -- and the timing for close encounters and direct impacts -- is an area of high pressure known as the Bermuda Azores high, or, simply, the Bermuda high. Forecasters say the Bermuda high's strength, orientation and central position can essentially steer storms away or toward the United States.

During the first part of the season, the center of the Bermuda high will likely be well west of the Azores, an island chain in the northern Atlantic. Due to this positioning, early-season storms are likely to be guided into or close to the United States.

During the latter stages of the season, the center of this high pressure area will move northeast and over the Azores. Kottlowski's team said this suggests more, but not necessarily all, storms could curve north and then northeastward, taking a track that moves them away from the United States.

	<p>With the official start of the season still months away, Kottowski is urging people to begin hurricane preparations now, particularly given the ongoing global supply chain issues along with the heightened possibility of an early storm.</p> <p>"Don't wait until June to prepare," he said. "We've had preseason development over the last seven years and certainly you need to prepare now. So now's the time to get your hurricane plan in place."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 NATO: Russia not withdrawing; regrouping</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-troops-not-withdrawing-regrouping-ukraine-nato-says-2022-03-31/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-troops-not-withdrawing-regrouping-ukraine-nato-says-2022-03-31/</a>
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS, March 31 (Reuters) - Russian forces in Ukraine are not withdrawing but regrouping, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Thursday, commenting on Moscow's announcements about a scaling down of military operations around Kyiv.</p> <p>Stoltenberg also said the alliance has yet to be convinced that Russia was negotiating in good faith in peace talks in Istanbul because Moscow's military objective since launching its invasion of Ukraine has not changed.</p> <p>"According to our intelligence, Russian units are not withdrawing but repositioning. Russia is trying to regroup, resupply and reinforce its offensive in the Donbas region," Stoltenberg told reporters in Brussels.</p> <p>Moscow says it is now focusing on "liberating" the Donbas region - two southeastern provinces partly controlled by separatists Russia has backed since 2014.</p> <p>"At the same time, Russia maintains pressure on Kyiv and other cities. So we can expect additional offensive actions, bringing even more suffering."</p> <p>Russia says it launched a "special military operation" to disarm and "denazify" its neighbour, and that the mission is going to plan.</p> <p>Stoltenberg said: "We have no real change in the real Russian objective ... they continue to pursue a military outcome."</p> <p>He also said NATO allies would continue to provide weapons to Ukraine for as long as necessary.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 Russia drafts 134,500 conscripts</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2022-03-31/russia-drafts-134-500-conscripts-but-says-they-wont-go-to-ukraine">https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2022-03-31/russia-drafts-134-500-conscripts-but-says-they-wont-go-to-ukraine</a>
GIST	<p>LONDON (Reuters) - President Vladimir Putin on Thursday signed a decree ordering 134,500 new conscripts into the army as part of Russia's annual spring draft, but the defence ministry said the call-up had nothing to do with the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>The order came five weeks into Russia's invasion, which has run into fierce Ukrainian resistance. Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said on Tuesday that none of those called up would be sent to any "hot spots".</p> <p>The issue of conscripts' involvement in the war is highly sensitive. On March 9, the defence ministry acknowledged that some had been sent to Ukraine after Putin had denied this on various occasions, saying only professional soldiers and officers had been sent in.</p> <p>Putin's spokesman said at the time that the president had ordered military prosecutors to investigate and punish the officials responsible for disobeying his instructions to exclude conscripts.</p>

The annual spring military draft, which runs from April 1 to July 15, will affect Russian men between the ages of 18 and 27, Putin's decree said.

Shoigu said on Tuesday that those called up would begin to be dispatched to their assigned bases in late May.

"Most military personnel will undergo professional training in training centres for three to five months. Let me emphasize that recruits will not be sent to any hot spots," he said in remarks published on his ministry's website.

However, Mikhail Benyash, a lawyer representing several members of Russia's National Guard who refused an order to go to Ukraine, said that under Russian law conscripts could be sent to fight after several months of training.

Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24 in what it called a special military operation to demilitarise and "denazify" the country. The war has killed thousands of people and uprooted millions.

In recent days Russia has reframed its objectives, saying it never intended to take the capital Kyiv and other major cities but is focused on "liberating" eastern areas where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting the Ukrainian army since 2014.

Its statements have been greeted sceptically by Ukraine and Western governments. Military analysts have suggested the declared focus on the eastern Donbas region may be an attempt to make it easier for Putin to seek a face-saving exit.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Russia oil tankers vanish off map</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/30/business/russia-sanctions-oil/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/30/business/russia-sanctions-oil/index.html</a>
GIST	<p><b>New York (CNN Business)</b>Russia's invasion of Ukraine made the country a pariah in the global energy market. Since the war started, a <a href="#">de facto embargo on Russian oil has emerged</a>, with oil <a href="#">companies</a>, trading houses, shippers and <a href="#">banks</a> backing away, all at the same time.</p> <p>Now, however, there are signs that Russian energy is drawing interest from potential buyers, at least in the shadows.</p> <p>As the <a href="#">war in Ukraine drags on</a>, Russian tankers carrying crude oil and petroleum products are increasingly disappearing from tracking systems.</p> <p>So-called dark activity, where ships' transponders are turned off for hours at a time, has in the past been viewed by US officials as a deceptive shipping practice that is often used to evade sanctions.</p> <p>Dark activity among Russian-affiliated crude oil tankers is up by 600% compared with before the war began, predictive intelligence company Windward, told CNN.</p> <p>"We're seeing a spike in Russian tankers turning off transmissions deliberately to circumvent sanctions," Windward CEO Ami Daniel said in an interview. "The Russian fleet is starting to hide its whereabouts and its exports."</p> <p>And this is not just happening with crude oil. Similar trends are playing out with other petroleum products, too.</p> <p>During the week of March 12, there were 33 occurrences of dark activity by Russian oil-chemical and oil-product tankers, according to Windward, which uses artificial intelligence to track the maritime industry. That's 236% higher than the weekly average of the prior 12 months.</p>

### **'These vessels want to disappear'**

International regulations require vessels like oil tankers keep their transponders on almost all the time.

In May 2020, the US Department of the Treasury sent a sanctions advisory to the maritime, energy and metals industries to address "illicit shipping and sanctions evasions practices."

The first example listed was "disabling or manipulating" automatic identification systems (AIS) on vessels to "mask their movement."

"AIS manipulation and disruption may indicate potential illicit or sanctionable activities," Treasury warned.

Ships may also go dark for safety reasons, including when traveling through pirate-infested waters. But Daniel, the Windward CEO, said that is not the reason ships are going dark now.

"These vessels want to disappear from radar. From a compliance perspective, it's a red flag," he said.

In a statement to CNN, a Treasury spokesperson said the agency is "aware of these reports" and works with partners and through a "variety of methods" to not solely rely on transponder broadcasts to monitor vessels of interest.

### **Taking a page from Iran's playbook**

Similar behavior was observed last decade when the United States leveled sanctions against Venezuela and Iran, making it illegal to buy oil from those nations.

"Russia is following the Venezuelan and Iranian playbook, with a slight twist," said Andy Lipow, president of consulting firm Lipow Oil Associates.

The twist is that, unlike with Venezuela and Iran, the West has not imposed sanctions directly on Russia's oil.

Yes, the White House [banned imports of Russian oil](#) into the United States. But that does not prohibit other countries from buying Russian energy.

### **'Public relations disaster'**

Still, the mere stigma of doing business with Russia, along with sanctions uncertainty, has created a de facto embargo. Analysts say that helps explain the spike in dark activity among Russian-flagged ships. Buyers don't want to be outed as the ones scooping up Russian oil during the deadly war in Ukraine.

"It's a public relations disaster," said Robert Yawger, vice president of energy futures at Mizuho Securities.

Likewise, shipping companies may want to avoid the scrutiny that comes from handling Russian crude.

"The ships are going dark because they are afraid if they take on Russian business, they will be blacklisted for a period of time and unable to get future business," said Lipow.

And yet there is a financial reason to buy Russian oil right now. Demand for energy is very high and -- in great measure because of the sanctions -- Russian crude is trading roughly \$30 cheaper than Brent crude, the world benchmark.

"You're getting a deep discount," said Michael Tran, managing director of global energy strategy at RBC Capital Markets. "The economic incentive is there, if you're not concerned about sanctions."

### **Where is the oil going?**



	<p>Research firm Rystad Energy estimates that between 1.2 million and 1.5 million barrels per day of Russian crude oil exports have vanished in the five weeks since the start of war.</p> <p>"The destination of the remaining crude exports from Russia... is increasingly 'unknown,'" Rystad Energy wrote in a report this week, noting that this mystery oil totals about 4.5 million barrels per day.</p> <p>So who <i>is</i> buying Russian oil?</p> <p>Analysts said there is <a href="#">evidence that refineries in China and India</a>, two of the world's largest oil consumers and fastest-growing economies, are stealthily buying Russian energy.</p> <p>Tran said trading houses may be buying Russian oil and putting the barrels in storage, including "floating storage" on tankers that remain at sea.</p> <p>Beyond dark activity, Windward found that some vessels and companies are still dealing with Russian-affiliated tankers and engaging in ship-to-ship transfers.</p> <p>In 2020, Treasury warned that ship-to-ship transfers, especially at night or in areas deemed high-risk for sanctions evasion, are "frequently used to evade sanctions by concealing the origin or destination" of oil, coal and other material.</p> <p>Despite the war in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia, the number of ship-to-ship meetings that lasted at least three hours between Russian-affiliated oil tankers and other vessels is "relatively normal," Windward said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Leisure travel soars at cost to consumers</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/leisure-travel-demand-soars-ticket-prices-increase/">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/leisure-travel-demand-soars-ticket-prices-increase/</a>
GIST	<p>Travelers are finally taking to the skies again, but the surge in demand is coinciding with high oil prices, driven by Russia's war on Ukraine.</p> <p>As a result, airlines are having to pay more for jet fuel, and they are passing some of those increased costs along to consumers.</p> <p>Gina Kramer and her daughter Frankie recently flew to Southern California to visit family they haven't seen in three years, in part because they didn't feel safe traveling during the pandemic.</p> <p>"So it's going to be a family reunion of sorts," Frankie told CBS News' Danya Bacchus.</p> <p>The trip is coming at a cost to the Kramers and other families that are prioritizing travel again.</p> <p>Airline ticket prices are soaring, according to data from <a href="#">Hopper</a>, an analytics company that tracks changes in airfare.</p> <p><b>Prices continue to climb</b></p> <p>The average cost of domestic roundtrip ticket was \$330 in March, up 40% from the beginning of this year. Airfare is expected to continue rising 10% through May, when a round trip ticket will cost, on average, \$360, according to Hopper.</p> <p>Gina Kramer experienced this first hand while browsing ticket prices online, noting that the longer she delayed booking, the more prices went up.</p> <p>"And if you missed a window, two days later, prices were like, \$100 more," she said.</p>



Higher prices aren't expected to deter travelers, though. An American Express Travel [survey](#) found that 72% of Americans plan to travel more this year than last.

This rise in demand is pushing up prices for nearly all-things travel-related, including hotel rooms.

"Domestic bookings are surging, hotels rates are going up nearing 2019 levels," said CBS News travel advisor Peter Greenberg. "People are now valuing travel as an experience they want to keep."

Airlines are also responding to the rebound in travel. [JetBlue recently cut 27 routes](#), many of which it added during the pandemic to hotspots in Florida and Mexico, when Americans were more limited in where they could go.

With higher fuel prices and trips to Europe back in play, some of the routes no longer make financial sense for the airline.

"Demand to these places is waning as people feel more comfortable going to cities," said Willis Orlando, a flights specialist at Scott's Cheap Flights, an airfare deals website. "If I were in the pricing department of an airline deciding what routes are profitable, I would say maybe we don't need to double down quite so hard on South Florida."

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HEADLINE	03/30 Ukraine widens gap between US, Mideast
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/30/ukraine-gulf-saudi-uae-biden/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/30/ukraine-gulf-saudi-uae-biden/</a>
GIST	<p>Russia's invasion of Ukraine has heightened existing strains in the Biden administration's relationships in the Middle East, even as it has brought new unity to NATO and transatlantic ties.</p> <p>Nowhere have the bonds been as frayed as with Persian Gulf partners Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Their reluctance to increase oil output as gas prices rise, along with what the Biden administration sees as a less-than-robust condemnation of Moscow, are among the most visible current reasons.</p> <p>Are you on Telegram? Subscribe to our channel for the latest updates on Russia's war in Ukraine. But in both cases, the sources of estrangement go far deeper. Gulf officials describe a mix of complaints that have caused them to doubt U.S. security guarantees, including what they consider the administration's failure to respond vigorously enough to ongoing missile attacks on their countries by Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, and its eagerness to sign a new nuclear deal with Tehran that does not address Iranian aggression in the region.</p> <p>Equally important is what they see as a lack of respect from a long-standing ally. "It goes beyond policy," said Jeffrey Feltman, who served for years as a top U.S. diplomat in the region and as U.N. undersecretary for political affairs. "It goes to the personal."</p> <p>President Biden, who described Saudi Arabia as a "pariah" state during his campaign, has not yet met or even had a conversation with the de facto Saudi leader, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Bin Salman's Emirati counterpart, Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, was said to be livid when weeks passed without a high-level U.S. visit or immediately positive response to requests for more air defense supplies after the first of a series of Houthi missile attacks hit the UAE on Jan. 17, according to people familiar with the matter who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomacy.</p> <p>In an effort to get the relationship back on track, Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday met with the Emirati crown prince in Morocco. Blinken was effusive as they shook hands for the cameras, saying he was "grateful for the time today, and actually I'm grateful for the time every day, because the partnership between our countries truly matters to the United States." The UAE, he said, was "a leader in the region, increasingly a leader in the world."</p>

Bin Zayed was terse. It was an “important opportunity,” he said. “I’m sure we have a lot to talk about, especially between our bilateral relationship.”

Speaking to reporters Wednesday, Blinken said he had “made very clear to him ... that the United States is a true partner to the UAE,” but provided few details. He said they did not focus on energy supply.

The administration, according to people familiar with the divide, has little patience with their complaints, and sees the resentments as business as usual in the region. With many crises to address, and pressure from within the Democratic Party and beyond to take a tougher line against the Persian Gulf monarchies, particularly Saudi Arabia, Biden has had little room to maneuver. U.S., Saudi and Emirati officials declined to comment.

A meeting, or even a phone call, with bin Salman, the Saudi crown prince — identified by the CIA as having ordered the 2018 assassination of Saudi journalist and U.S. resident Jamal Khashoggi — would be problematic for Biden’s already tenuous relations with many in Congress, where the crown prince is regularly denounced. Biden was willing to meet him at last year’s Group of 20 conference in Rome or at the climate summit in Scotland, but bin Salman declined to attend the gatherings. The White House would not have objected, people familiar with events said, if the crown prince had picked up the phone during last month’s call between his father, King Salman bin Abdul Aziz, and Biden.

For the Emiratis, the reasons for estrangement are more diffuse, including U.S. delays in the sale of F-35 fighter jets, and the Iran negotiations. But those irritants pale beside what the Emiratis consider a tepid U.S. response to Houthi attacks when the first missiles rained down from Yemen on fuel tankers in Abu Dhabi, killing three civilians.

Relatively common against Saudi Arabia, the rare strike against the Emiratis — whose direct involvement in the Saudi-led war against the Houthis ended several years ago — was the beginning of weeks of similar attacks, all but the first intercepted by U.S.-provided missiles from Patriot and THAAD air defense systems. In response, the UAE appealed to the United States for more interceptors, more intelligence on Houthi movements, and the U.S. re-designation of the Houthis as a terrorist organization, a measure that would open those dealing with them to criminal penalties.

Donald Trump had imposed the designation the day before leaving office, a move that led to harsh criticism from humanitarian groups that the action was an impediment to aid shipments for suffering civilians. In response, Biden lifted the measure.

The recent attacks heightened the Emiratis’ sense of vulnerability over the pending Iran nuclear deal, and they found the U.S. response lacking, according to the people familiar with exchanges between the two.

Compounding their ire were reports that the administration is considering lifting its designation of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization, as part of the nuclear negotiations. An IRGC delegation showed up at a defense show last week in Doha, Qatar — a regional rival for U.S. affections. Qatar insisted it had invited only Iran’s defense ministry, and didn’t know the IRGC was coming. The State Department released a statement saying it was “deeply disappointed and troubled” by the appearance.

But the Arab states and others in the region share a concern about U.S. priorities regarding Tehran, said James Jeffrey, a former U.S. ambassador who served as the Trump administration’s envoy to defeat the Islamic State. Calling on the administration to take steps that would prove to gulf allies that Biden is willing to embrace more than harsh rhetoric about Iran, Jeffrey described the action as “a football game where your team never scores any points and keeps on losing the ball, but the coach keeps yelling” that the team can win.

In response to the UAE appeals for more weapons, U.S. officials — juggling demands for Patriots and other interceptors from Saudi Arabia and European allies on NATO’s eastern flank — note that UAE

stockpiles are far from depleted. The Emiratis already have more advanced U.S.-made weaponry than many American partners, including the THAAD system, which was first used in combat in response to the Houthi attacks.

The administration, which had cut off all but defensive assistance to the Saudis in the Yemen war, said it had no access to the high-altitude surveillance of the Houthis the Emiratis wanted, something the UAE didn't believe, several people familiar with the situation said. The Houthis are undoubtedly a terrorist organization, but the administration considers re-designation complicated, not necessarily because of the lobbying of humanitarian groups but because U.S. and international banks would refuse to facilitate aid and transport to Yemen for fear of criminal charges.

But none of these disputes appeared to mean as much to the UAE — or to more exasperate the Americans — as the failure to publicly show up in the Emirati hour of need. While both sides agree that there were many high-level telephone calls, a U.S. statement denouncing the Houthis, and visits in February by Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., then head of the U.S. Central Command, and Brett McGurk, the senior Middle East official on the National Security Council, it was not seen as enough by a country that has participated with U.S. forces in conflicts from Kosovo to Afghanistan.

When Biden finally called bin Zayed last month, he was told that the time was not right, and promises from both sides to reschedule have so far come to naught.

Bilal Saab, a former Pentagon official who is director of the defense and security program of the Middle East Institute, said that gulf nations didn't seem to fully grasp the slow workings of U.S. bureaucracy. "Even with our closest NATO allies we can't instantly send our senior emissaries and deploy military equipment to support them," he said. "It may just be that the gulf states' expectations of the United States are too high, which is causing much of this disappointment."

In recent weeks, the breach has worsened. A week after Emirati Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan met with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Dubai this month, and joined his public call for the world to stop isolating Moscow-backed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, the UAE hosted Assad for a visit.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia declined U.S. appeals to increase their oil output to make up for market shortfalls during the Ukraine crisis, and the Emiratis abstained in a U.S.-backed U.N. Security Council vote condemning Russia.

Explaining the U.N. vote, the UAE's representative said the outcome — failure because of a Russian veto — was a foregone conclusion. Others familiar with the situation said that the abstention was a trade-off for Russia not to veto an upcoming resolution sanctioning the Houthis. But while the Emiratis later voted in favor of a U.N. General Assembly resolution condemning the Russians in Ukraine, the lack of support was noticed.

Speaking Tuesday at the annual World Government Summit in Dubai, oil ministers from both countries said they had no regrets about restraining production. Their focus, they said, is on the "sustainability" of world energy supplies, and they said they tried never to mix politics and oil.

"I've been at this for the last 35 years, and I know how we manage to compartmentalize our political issues to what is for the common good for all of us," Saudi Minister Suhail bin Mohamed al Mazrouei said.

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HEADLINE	03/30 Severe storms, tornadoes across South
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/03/30/severe-storm-outbreak-south-tornado/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/03/30/severe-storm-outbreak-south-tornado/</a>

A substantial severe weather outbreak swept across the Deep South Wednesday and Wednesday night as intense thunderstorms barreled across the region. Numerous tornadoes touched down amid scores of reports of wind damage.

Over [180,000 customers](#) were without power in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky and Indiana late Wednesday night, mainly due to high winds. The Weather Service [had received](#) 183 reports of damaging winds and 25 reports of tornadoes. Many of the reports were from downed trees and power lines, but some indicated damage to homes and buildings.

While severe storms were most prevalent Wednesday evening through around midnight Thursday, [tornado watches](#) remained in effect into Thursday morning in the following zones:

- Southern Alabama and the western Florida Panhandle, until 4 a.m. Central time.
- Eastern Alabama, western Georgia and the central Florida Panhandle, until 8 a.m. Central time.

Just before midnight. Central time, [a line of vigorous thunderstorms](#) stretched from north central Alabama to the Alabama Gulf Coast. [Tornado warnings](#) were in effect just to the west of Montgomery and to the east of Mobile.

Between 11 p.m. and midnight, the Weather Service confirmed a tornado just south of Mobile and between 10 and 11 p.m., the Weather Service had also issued a warning for a confirmed tornado to the northeast of Biloxi, Miss.

Numerous tornado warnings were also issued south and southwest of Birmingham between 10 and 11:00 p.m. Central time, including a particularly dangerous situation tornado warning for “a confirmed large and extremely dangerous tornado” for north central Chilton and southeastern Bibb counties.

Tornado activity increased dramatically in parts of southern Mississippi and Alabama Wednesday night. At 8:51 p.m. Central time, the Weather Service’s Storm Prediction Center wrote that “significant tornado threat” was materializing in extreme southeast Mississippi and southwest Alabama. Areas near McClain, Miss., appeared to be struck by a tornado based on storm chaser reports. Toomsoba, Miss., was also hit by a twister; the National Weather Service had issued a particularly dangerous situation tornado warning for the town, [cautioning of a confirmed large and dangerous tornado](#).

Late Wednesday afternoon, the Weather Service warned of a confirmed tornado near Jackson, Miss. as radar detected debris lofted into the air. Social media footage revealed damage in the city.

Wednesday began when a destructive tornado passed through Springdale, a city in northwestern Arkansas, sending seven people to the hospital, [according to the ABC affiliate in Fort Smith, Ark.](#) Significant damage was done to [a local elementary school](#). The Weather Service [tweeted](#) that it found damage consistent with at least an EF2 tornado on the 0 to 5 scale for intensity.

Additional severe thunderstorms are possible along the East Coast on Thursday, and there are signs that April is favored to feature considerable above-average severe thunderstorm and tornado activity across the Lower 48.

“Review your severe weather safety procedures for the possibility of dangerous weather today,” the Storm Prediction Center urged in a public severe weather outlook released early Wednesday.

#### **Areas affected**

The storms erupted amid a Level 4 out of 5 risk zone drawn by the Storm Prediction Center that encompassed the entirety of Mississippi, western Alabama, eastern Louisiana and southwestern Tennessee.

Memphis; Tupelo, Starkville, Hattiesburg, Meridian and Jackson, Miss.; Tuscaloosa, Mobile and Montgomery, Ala.; and Monroe and Alexandria, La., were in the greatest-risk category. A lesser, but still

formidable, Level 3 out of 5 enhanced risk covered Nashville, Little Rock, New Orleans, Birmingham and Huntsville, Ala.

### **Predicted hazards**

Storms that developed Wednesday morning had take the shape of a QLCS, or quasi-linear convective system, as they worked into Louisiana midday. That's essentially a squall line with embedded kinks of rotation, each of which could become tornadic.

Given the setup, a few things are worth noting:

- Thunderstorms will move *very* quickly across the Deep South. That may cut back on how much advance notice of dangerous weather can be provided.
- With strong jet stream winds aloft, it will be easy for thunderstorms to mix momentum down to the surface. That means widespread 60 to 80 mph winds within thunderstorms.
- Even apart from any thunderstorms, winds might gust up to 50 mph ahead of the squall line and then over 35 mph in the wake of the storms as winds switch around out of the northwest.
- There is sufficient wind shear to support scattered quick-forming, brief and erratic tornadoes along the QLCS. Because of the swift forward motion of the line, it wouldn't take much for a couple to cause EF2+ damage. There could also be a few embedded rotating thunderstorms or supercells in southern portions of the line over southern Mississippi, the Delta in Louisiana or southern Alabama.

### **East Coast storm risk on Thursday**

On Thursday, vigorous storms are possible from New York state to Florida. The zone of greatest risk for severe weather, classified as a Level 2 out of 5, covers the Mid-Atlantic from Richmond to Scranton, Pa., including the Washington-Baltimore region and northern Florida to southern South Carolina.

"Damaging wind gusts and hail are the primary threats, but low-level vertical shear is strong enough to support a tornado or two," the Storm Prediction Center wrote.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Climate change: pollen season worse</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/03/29/pollen-climate-change-worse-future/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/03/29/pollen-climate-change-worse-future/</a>
GIST	<p>If you head to Georgia, you will find sprawling southern live oak trees older than the Declaration of Independence. Often adorned in Spanish moss, the evergreen mammoths are featured in postcards and movies as a symbol of the South.</p> <p>Of course, you may not notice the impressive attributes of Georgia's state tree through the bouts of sneezing, coughing and itchy eyes they also famously cause with their pollen.</p> <p>"Patients, sometimes when they have significant allergies to the pollen, tell me that they just can't function. They feel run down. They don't have the energy they used to have," said Stanley Fineman, a physician at Atlanta Allergy &amp; Asthma, one of the largest allergy practices in Georgia.</p> <p>The problem has only worsened. In Fineman's four decades of private practice, he has seen pollen season start earlier and become more intense. Years ago, he used to tell patients to take their allergy medicine from St. Patrick's Day through Memorial Day. In recent years, he now tells them to start their medication around Valentine's Day and continue through the summer. This year, pollen counts were high on Feb. 14 in the Atlanta region, at 846 pollen grains per cubic meter of air.</p> <p>Unfortunately, neither the oak tree nor Atlanta is unique. The culprit? Climate change.</p> <p>Across the country, pollen season is starting earlier and intensifying because of rising global temperatures and carbon dioxide concentrations. Previous research showed that pollen season lengthened by 20 days over the past three decades across North America, while pollen concentrations increased by 21 percent. The most affected places were the U.S. Southeast and Midwest.</p>

And a recent study said pollen season could get much worse by the end of the century. Pollen season could start as much as 40 days earlier in the spring and last up to 19 days longer than it does today under a high greenhouse gas emission scenario. Pollen levels could also triple in some parts of the United States.

“When we look at what’s driving a lot of the duration in season change, temperature plays a big role,” said Allison Steiner, co-author of the study and an atmospheric scientist at the University of Michigan. Warmer temperatures can shift the growing season earlier and extend it longer, as well as help plants produce more pollen. Higher levels of carbon dioxide can also aid photosynthesis so plants produce more pollen, although more research is needed to understand the future increase.

Unlike previous studies, the team looked at different pollen types across the country for future projections. Overall, every region is expected to see an increase in pollen production from grass in the summer by the end of the century. Pollen season will change more in the North than in the South because of larger increases in temperature. However, some regions will feel more pronounced effects than others because of the distribution of tree species.

“We’re looking at the 15 different pollen emitting species and they are reacting differently to climate change,” said Yingxiao Zhang, a study co-author and PhD student at the University of Michigan. “When we look at the end of a century, we saw many species during pollen season actually shifts closer to each other, so the pollen season has more overlap.”

For instance, the Northeast could experience a more intense pollen season as the blooming of various trees, such as the oak and birch, overlap more.

The Pacific Northwest could begin pollen season a month earlier because of early pollination of the alder tree.

Overall, the Southeast will experience the highest increase in pollen production in the United States because of its dominant tree species, such as oak and cypress.

“Trees tend to really put out a lot of pollen, much more so than grasses and weeds. If we look at it like on a per-grain perspective, they’re one of the bigger emitters,” Steiner said. “They have a fair amount of surface area and they can produce a lot of pollen in the spring.”

In fact, much of the past growth in pollination concentrations — especially in the Southeast — is attributed to tree pollen. In Atlanta, Fineman and his colleagues conducted a study and found the average daily pollen concentration of oak increased by 5 percent per year over the past 27 years.

“When people are exposed to the allergen, it triggers a cascade of events in their body. Their system releases various chemicals, such as histamine, that can cause symptoms of nasal congestion, sneezing and itchy eyes,” Fineman said.

With longer and more intense pollen seasons, he said, his patients tend to have more complications, such as sinus infections and asthma. Studies also show the burden to medically treat allergies costs billions of dollars, while other studies show allergy sufferers miss millions of workdays in a year.

By the end of the century, Steiner and Zhang calculated, the United States will experience a 200 percent increase in total pollen for the most extreme greenhouse gas emissions scenario. With pledges and measures to lower greenhouse gas emissions, though, some climate scientists say somewhat lower emissions are more plausible.

“What [this study] really highlights is how much climate policy and tackling climate change matters,” said William Anderegg, a plant ecologist at the University of Utah who was not involved in the study. “Just by moving from a high emissions scenario to a moderate emissions scenario, we can avoid about half of the changes in pollen season severity.”

Anderegg previously conducted a study showing how climate change has affected pollen season across the nation from 1990 to 2018. He found the amount of pollen in the air is at least 8 percent worse because of human-caused climate change. At least half of the trend in earlier pollen seasons is also due to human-caused climate change.

In the near future, Steiner is working with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to potentially create a pollen forecast model. “You could show animations of where we think pollen is going to be high on this certain day, and that could enable people to make decisions about medication or days to stay inside if you’re allergic,” she said.

That’s also why Fineman and his staff at Atlanta Allergy & Asthma have operated their own pollen-counting station for more than 25 years. The station, certified by the National Allergy Bureau, uses a machine on a rooftop to collect pollen over a 24-hour period. Fineman and his technicians then identify and count individual pollen grains under a microscope and report the number. Today, more than 20,000 people receive the daily pollen count email at the height of spring pollen season.

“By knowing what’s in the air, like what allergens are causing symptoms, we’re able to get the treatment plan that they need,” Fineman said. “We can help our patients.”

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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 Sanctions? Russia ruble, banks recovering</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/03/31/ruble-recovery-sanctions-russia/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/03/31/ruble-recovery-sanctions-russia/</a>
GIST	<p>Russia’s ruble and banking system are showing continued signs of recovery from the initial punch of sanctions, as Moscow relies on energy exports and currency controls to partly protect the nation’s economy.</p> <p>After <a href="#">initially plummeting</a>, the ruble has rebounded and is edging closer to the value it held before the war began, according to the official exchange rate. And the banking system is gradually stabilizing as panicked customer withdrawals subside, economists say.</p> <p>Some of the recovery is artificial, made possible by <a href="#">strict limits</a> that the central bank, the Bank of Russia, has placed on currency exchange, withdrawals and hard-currency transfers overseas. But it is also due to a very real factor still working in Russia’s favor: <a href="#">strong oil and gas exports</a> that bring a flood of hard currency into the country.</p> <p>“I think the key signal is that, for now, it appears the Bank of Russia managed to avoid a deep financial crisis,” said Elina Ribakova, deputy chief economist at the Institute of International Finance, an association of banks and finance companies. “We were concerned that bank runs as a result of sanctions could bring down some of the more systemic [state-owned] banks. It appears that it has not happened.”</p> <p>In the days after Russia’s invasion began on Feb. 24, the ruble fell from about 80 to the dollar to a low of 120 to the dollar. It has now climbed back to 84, according to the <a href="#">central bank’s official rate</a>.</p> <p>Russia’s economy is still experiencing a lot of pain that is likely to intensify, economists say. They forecast that inflation could <a href="#">reach at least 20 percent this year</a>, and that gross domestic product will <a href="#">shrink by 15 percent</a>, wiping away years of economic growth.</p> <p>Some imported goods are disappearing from store shelves as global shipping companies halt deliveries, and some manufacturers are suspending production because sanctions are preventing them from buying electronic components.</p> <p>Hundreds of Western corporations <a href="#">have stopped operations</a> in Russia, depriving the country of consumer goods and thousands of jobs. And tens of thousands of young professionals have fled the country out of opposition to the war or fear of sanctions, causing a devastating <a href="#">brain drain</a>.</p>



Amid all of this instability, the ruble's recovery, even if manipulated by currency controls, helps the state convey an image of control, said Janis Kluge, an economist at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin.

"The psychological effect is very important," he said. "It's very important what the population thinks about the health of the economy, and the ruble is one of the main indicators that every Russian knows."

The official rate doesn't necessarily reflect the ruble's real value, economists say. The central bank has [banned citizens](#) from exchanging rubles for dollars until Sept. 9, creating a [black market](#) where the ruble trades at weaker values than the official rate, according to Russian economists and [media reports](#).

One of the toughest sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies was a freeze on the Russian central bank's foreign currency reserves. That was designed to stop Russia from using its stash of dollars and euros to buy rubles to prop up the ruble's value.

But Russia has found a partial way around that punishment: The central bank in late February began requiring exporting companies to exchange 80 percent of their hard-currency revenue for rubles, creating new demand for Russia's currency.

Russia's continuing oil and gas exports, amid high global prices, has ensured a steady stream of hard currency to support this state-mandated exchange.

"Yes, this is not a freely determined ruble exchange rate, but we could have easily seen a scenario where a [central bank] would have not managed to prevent further ruble depreciation even with emergency measures. Furthermore, Russia is continuing to enjoy large [foreign currency] inflows as it is still selling commodities," Ribakova said.

Just after sanctions hit, long lines appeared at ATMs as panicked Russians queued to withdraw cash, worried about a collapse of the currency and the banking system. That forced banks to borrow heavily from the central bank to meet demand for withdrawals, Ribakova said. But this borrowing [has lessened](#) in recent days, showing that the banking sector is stabilizing, she added.

The ruble's recovery, and the strong financing that oil and gas revenue are giving Russia's government and war effort, have heightened calls from Ukraine and its supporters for an embargo on Russian energy exports.

The United States and United Kingdom have stopped buying Russian oil and gas, and [Poland on Wednesday said](#) it will halt Russian oil imports by the end of the year.

Other European nations, including Germany, have vowed to drastically cut imports but have been reluctant to embrace full embargoes because they rely heavily on Russian energy.

"If we see more shelling and bombing, I would say pressure will be growing on Germany, in particular" to adopt a full embargo, said Maria Shagina, a sanctions expert at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

On a scale of 1 to 10, the current sanctions on Russia are a 7 or 8 in intensity, says Edward Fishman, a former State Department official who worked on sanctions policy during the Obama administration.

In addition to halting purchases of Russian oil and gas, there are several other steps Western countries can still take to increase pressure, he said. These include adopting full blocking sanctions on more Russian banks and companies, and cutting more banks from SWIFT, the global financial messaging system that serves as the backbone for bank-to-bank transactions worldwide.

	<p>At the moment, only one of Russia's five largest banks, VTB, has been cut off from SWIFT and subjected to full blocking sanctions, said Fishman, who is now adjunct professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University.</p> <p>"There was sort of a big bang of sanctions in the first 10 days of Putin's declaration of war ... but I think pressure has leveled off in the last few weeks," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Putin gambled on Russians' support</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2022-03-30/putin-gambled-on-russians-support-for-war-in-ukraine-now-he-faces-a-new-front-at-home">https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2022-03-30/putin-gambled-on-russians-support-for-war-in-ukraine-now-he-faces-a-new-front-at-home</a>
GIST	<p>Of the factors that contributed to Russian President Vladimir Putin's <a href="#">decision to invade Ukraine</a> in late February, none was more prominent than the support he felt from his citizens, the top U.S. officer for operations in Europe told Congress on Wednesday.</p> <p>"He was attempting to take advantage of fissures that could have appeared in NATO as a result of the <a href="#">post-Afghanistan environment</a>," Air Force Gen. Tod Wolters, commander of U.S. European Command, told the House Armed Services Committee Wednesday morning when asked about Putin's decision-making. "I also think it has to do with <a href="#">his age and his efficacy</a>. And all those combined together put him into a position where he elected to go at this time."</p> <p>"But the overriding variable, in my view," Wolters added, "is the fact he believes that he has popular support of his citizens."</p> <p>And – like the capability of the Russian military and the determined resistance of Ukrainian forces – it may be a factor he misread.</p> <p>The question of Putin's support at home has emerged as perhaps the most pressing variable facing Western officials as they decide how to proceed in Ukraine and effectively pressure on the aging autocrat. For them, a focus on ending the conflict in the former Soviet state has become as important as ensuring it doesn't spill over into a larger war – perhaps even with NATO as a whole.</p> <p>Putin has long enjoyed high approval ratings at home in part, Western analysts say, due to a <a href="#">murderous persecution of his political adversaries</a>, tight controls on information available to the average citizen there and a staunch crackdown on displays of public dissent.</p> <p>Faced with the conundrum of successfully pressuring Putin, President Joe Biden and other leaders in Europe have directed particular attention on the unity of NATO countries. They believe collectively they have implemented devastating economic and diplomatic pressure on the Russian government and its wealthiest backers. Simultaneously they have bolstered military support for Ukraine, making costs imposed on Russians operating there significantly more deadly than anyone appears to have expected – at least 10,000 Russian soldiers have died there according to leaked accounts in Moscow. Western assessments place the death toll in excess of 16,000 and at least enough to force <a href="#">a widespread retreat</a>.</p> <p>Some indications show that the pressure is having some effect. A well-attended <a href="#">pro-war, anti-Nazi rally</a> Putin held in Moscow in mid-March provided a spectacle of nationalism, surprising some Western officials, and followed on new polling that indicates as many as three-quarters of Russian citizens support the invasion of Ukraine – or at least Putin's accounting of it.</p> <p>But reports quickly emerged following the March 18 rally at Moscow's Luzhniki Stadium that many attendees were forced to be there. And some allegedly <a href="#">interrupted Putin with whistles</a> and other subtle signs of discontent when he referenced Russians' willingness to die for their country's causes.</p> <p>Thousands of Russians have been arrested for defying Putin and taking to the streets in mass demonstrations. Putin himself this month, in the midst of prosecuting the war and navigating new</p>

economic sanctions, made time for unusually vitriolic remarks against his own people, lashing out at the “scum and the traitors” that he claimed were backed by the West and bent on the destruction of Russia.

The question now is whether Western pressure – and its effect on the Russian people – will change Putin’s behavior or make him more dangerous.

“The problem is we have no data to judge. No polls in an authoritarian regime during wartime can say anything about true attitudes,” says Ivan Kurilla, a political scientist based in St. Petersburg. “People are really afraid to respond or to protest as the regime has demonstrated its cruelty.”

“However, there are a number of signs that should say much for any knowing authoritarian states,” he adds.

Few private citizens have embraced the idea of affixing “Z” signs to their vehicles in support of the war effort, Kurilla says. A YouTube feed of Putin’s rally included a high proportion of comments [criticizing the war and Putin himself](#). Scholars, artists and teachers numbering in the thousands have signed letters opposing the war – far outnumbering similar efforts manufactured by Moscow using state employees. And opposition has grown persistent enough that Putin’s own spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, was forced to acknowledge its presence, albeit by downplaying it as a minority of the country.

Perhaps most telling for Kurilla are the prison sentences for as long as 15 years that the Kremlin has imposed on those who refer to the ongoing conflict as a “war,” rather than a “special military operation” as Putin has insisted, or for other perceived slights on the Russian government.

“They would never try to scare people if they feel real support,” Kurilla says.

Yet some Russians have appeared genuine in the relatively high regard they hold for the former KGB officer, his carefully crafted strongman image and his determination to restore what he considers Russia’s rightful place as a global power.

And other domestic and foreign sources of potential pressure on the Russian leader are showing signs of waning. The Russian ruble as of Wednesday had almost recovered its value against the dollar having plummeted in the aftermath of its unprovoked invasion.

European powers on Wednesday also faced the uncomfortable prospect of Russia turning off its gas flows, following their refusal of Putin’s demand that they pay Russia in rubles to avoid crippling sanctions. [Germany warned its citizens](#) about potential shortages in gas supply and urged households to conserve energy use.

Despite the modest gains Putin may have made in outlasting international pressure, his grip on the levers of power at home in many ways remains tenuous.

In an apparent acknowledgement of the carnage their forces were facing in Ukraine, Russian commanders began an orchestrated retreat from some city centers in the north and removed some to Belarus to recover and refit, the British Ministry of Defense reported Wednesday morning.

“Such activity is placing further pressure on Russia’s already strained logistics and demonstrates the difficulties Russia is having reorganising its units in forward areas within Ukraine,” according to a statement from the ministry.

For example, both the British ministry and the Pentagon, which confirmed the Russian moves, warned that Moscow appears willing to escalate violence in other ways – likely indiscriminate shelling of civilian centers in Ukraine – to cover for their temporary setbacks.

And it remains to be seen how the escalation will affect Putin’s estimation of his support at home.

HEADLINE	03/30 Seattle director public safety outlines plans
SOURCE	<a href="https://queenanneneews.com/Content/News/News/Article/Seattle-director-of-public-safety-outlines-early-plans-for-city-neighborhoods-to-QA-committee/26/337/42360">https://queenanneneews.com/Content/News/News/Article/Seattle-director-of-public-safety-outlines-early-plans-for-city-neighborhoods-to-QA-committee/26/337/42360</a>
GIST	<p>While addressing public safety issues in the downtown core — Third Avenue specifically — is a top priority at the moment, Andrew Myerberg, Seattle’s director of public safety, assures residents local neighborhoods won’t be forgotten.</p> <p>Myerberg spoke with the Queen Anne Community Council Public Safety Committee last week, sharing his top priorities for his new position. Mayor Bruce Harrell created the director of public safety position and hired Myerberg, previously the Office of Police Accountability director, to be part of his administration when he took over. Among Myerberg’s duties for the city are developing new models of public safety, working collaboratively with the Seattle police and fire departments and helping guide oversight and reform efforts, according to a press release.</p> <p>“It’s positive, no matter what, and it’s a good thing,” Myerberg said. “It’s been very interesting work thus far, and it’s a lot of work.”</p> <p>Myerberg told the Public Safety Committee and community members last week that one of the main functions of his job is developing a procedure for public safety and police response plan unique to each neighborhood that addresses their needs.</p> <p>Another function is implementing alternative policing programs, to best serve Seattle, which would dedicate a core number of Seattle police officers to serious and violent crime, while creating offshoots to address other issues, such as mental health calls. Myerberg said one of the things he’ll be considering is programs that will ensure quicker response times from the police department.</p> <p>Another focus will be rebuilding Seattle police officer numbers, which he said are woefully inadequate, and negotiating contracts with Seattle’s public safety unions.</p> <p>“It’s just bringing everything together through collective bargaining,” Myerberg said.</p> <p>He said the city ideally needs another 400 or more patrol officers to “upstaff the department” but could find some relief in the form of community service officers who would have limited duties but would, nevertheless, lessen some of the strain on the department and benefit neighborhoods.</p> <p>Myerberg said he anticipates community partnerships with different stakeholders will also be key to improving key issues in the city, such as homelessness and drug addiction.</p> <p>He said currently the city doesn’t have enough services for individuals experiencing significant problems, such as mental illness and drug addiction, which means working closely with programs already in place to help shore up the gaps.</p> <p>“As you all know, we cannot arrest our way out of these public safety issues that we are facing,” Myerberg said. “... We need to have a more innovative way to approach crime and to approach people and meet them where they’re at. ... The reality is we are going to try a number of strategies to increase public safety, and some will work and some will not work.”</p> <p>He stressed, however, that he doesn’t want to put any plan or program in place unless he’s certain it is the right course of action to take. He said Harrell is committed to improving public safety in the city, but “there are a lot of things that we need to rectify.”</p> <p>Myerberg said he understands residents’ frustrations and doesn’t begrudge them those feelings.</p> <p>“I can commit to you that things are going to be different,” he said. “We have to help people first, but if we can’t, then we have to hold them accountable.”</p>

	<p>He also stressed that residents should call 911 when appropriate because those calls will be useful when creating public safety plans unique to specific neighborhoods.</p> <p>“Please, please, please, don’t get frustrated and not call 911,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Judge: ‘geofence warrant’ unconstitutional</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/geofence-warrant-unconstitutional-judge-rules-in-virginia/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/geofence-warrant-unconstitutional-judge-rules-in-virginia/</a>
GIST	<p>RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — A warrant that used Google location history to find people near the scene of a 2019 bank robbery violated their constitutional protection against unreasonable searches, a federal judge has ruled.</p> <p>The decision — believed to be the first of its kind — could make it more difficult for police to continue using an investigative technique that has exploded in popularity in recent years, privacy experts say.</p> <p>The ruling came earlier this month in a closely watched Virginia case in which the robbery suspect argued that the use of a “geofence warrant” violated the Fourth Amendment. Geofence warrants seek location data on every person within a specific location over a certain period of time. To work, those people must be using cellphones or other electronic devices that have the location history feature enabled.</p> <p>U.S. District Judge Hannah Lauck found that the warrant violated the constitution by gathering the location history of people near the bank without having any evidence that they had anything to do with the robbery.</p> <p>“The warrant simply did not include any facts to establish probable cause to collect such broad and intrusive data from each of these individuals,” Lauck wrote in her ruling.</p> <p>The judge said she was not ruling on whether geofence warrants can ever satisfy the Fourth Amendment, but privacy advocates said the decision could make it more difficult for police to persuade magistrates to grant such warrants.</p> <p>“She’s saying that’s a general search that’s just sweeping up people, most of whom have nothing to do with the thing you are investigating,” said Jennifer Stisa Granick, surveillance and cybersecurity counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union. “You have to seriously consider the impact on uninvolved people and their privacy, and the balance of power between people and law enforcement.”</p> <p>Jennifer Lynch, surveillance litigation director for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a nonprofit digital rights group, said attorneys around the country could cite the ruling in their own cases because it is believed to be the first time a federal district court judge has ruled on the constitutionality of a geofence warrant.</p> <p>“It’s helpful to other judges to see how a judge has dealt with this, especially since the technology is so new,” Lynch said.</p> <p>Police say geofence warrants are a useful investigatory technique that has helped lead them to suspects in an array of crimes around the country, including home invasions in Minnesota, a slaying in Georgia and a fatal shooting in North Carolina. Defense attorneys, however, say they ensnare innocent people and violate the privacy of anyone whose cellphone happens to be in the vicinity of where a crime occurred.</p> <p>In the Virginia case, a man walked into the Call Federal Credit Union in Midlothian on May 20, 2019, waved a gun and threatened to kill a teller’s family if he did not get at least \$100,000 in cash. The robber, who was seen on surveillance video holding a cellphone in his hand, escaped with \$195,000.</p>

After following a couple of leads that didn't pan out, police went to a magistrate judge and obtained a geofence search warrant, seeking location history from Google for any devices located within a 150-meter (164-yard) radius of the bank around the time of the robbery.

Google turned over location data for 19 devices without providing any identifying information. Police then narrowed down their request to three devices, for which Google provided the information. Police arrested Okello Chatrie, who was charged with armed robbery.

Bank cameras showed the robber came and went from an area where a church worker saw a suspicious person. Chatrie's location history matched these movements.

Chatrie's lawyers declined to comment on Lauck's ruling. In court papers, they called the warrant the equivalent of "searching the bags of every person walking along Broadway because of a theft in Times Square."

Chatrie, who has pleaded not guilty and is awaiting trial, will not benefit from Lauck's ruling. She denied his lawyers' request to suppress the evidence produced by the warrant, finding that the detective was not at fault because he had consulted with prosecutors before applying for the warrant and relied on his past experience in obtaining three similar warrants.

Google said it is reviewing the court's ruling. "We vigorously protect the privacy of our users, including by pushing back on overly broad requests, while supporting the important work of law enforcement," the company said in a statement.

In a legal brief, Google said geofence requests jumped 1,500% from 2017 to 2018, and another 500% from 2018 to 2019. Google now reports that geofence warrants make up more than 25% of all the warrants Google receives in the U.S., the judge wrote in her ruling.

Prosecutors declined to comment. In court documents, they argued Chatrie had no reasonable expectation of privacy since he voluntarily opted in to Google's Location History.

Lauck urged "legislative action" on the issue, noting that there is currently no law prohibiting Google and other companies from collecting and using vast amounts of data from their customers.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 EBRD: Russia steep slump, long stagnation</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-set-for-steep-slump-and-long-stagnation-in-wake-of-ukraine-war-11648702801">https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-set-for-steep-slump-and-long-stagnation-in-wake-of-ukraine-war-11648702801</a>
GIST	<p>Russia's invasion of Ukraine will cause their economies to contract this year by about 10% and 20%, respectively, the region's leading development bank said Thursday in one of the most in-depth economic assessments to date of the war's impact on the two countries.</p> <p>The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development said the slump in Russia would likely turn into a long period of stagnation while neighboring economies would rebound next year as long as a sustainable cease-fire is secured over the coming months.</p> <p>While Ukraine will suffer more in the short term because of the extensive damage to its physical infrastructure, Russia faces more long-term challenges from an exodus of well-educated workers and the loss of access to Western technologies under current sanctions, the bank said.</p> <p>The EBRD was set up in 1991 to help countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union make the transition from centrally planned to market economies. It stopped making new investments in Russia after that country's 2014 annexation of Crimea and said Monday it was closing its Moscow office.</p>



The bank said it estimates that the territory most directly affected by the fighting accounts for 60% of Ukraine's annual economic output and that about a third of Ukrainian businesses have had to suspend operations. Electricity consumption is down 60% on normal levels for this time of year, it said.

Assuming that a cease-fire can be negotiated in the next two months, the EBRD expects Ukraine's gross domestic product to contract by a fifth this year, compared with its previous estimate of 3.5% growth. The economy should then rebound and grow by 23% in 2023 if it receives reconstruction assistance.

"Even in the optimistic scenario of reconstruction going into full swing, it is still going to be a much poorer country simply because a lot of stock has been destroyed," said Beata Javorcik, the EBRD's chief economist.

After Moscow's attack on Ukraine, the U.S. and its allies have adopted some of the most severe economic sanctions ever taken against a country with the explicit aim of damaging Russia's economy, cutting it off from international finance and barring it from importing key technologies.

The EBRD expects those sanctions to contribute to a 10% contraction in the Russian economy this year, having previously anticipated growth of 3%. In contrast to its outlook for Ukraine, the bank doesn't expect a rebound in 2023 and sees prospects beyond then remaining weak.

"There will be less investment, less international trade, less integration of Russia into global value chains, and this combined with people leaving Russia means lower long-term productivity growth," said Ms. Javorcik.

The EBRD economist said that drag on growth would likely persist even if sanctions were lifted as part of a peace agreement.

"This effect, I would expect it to linger way beyond sanctions, if there's no regime change," she said.

The prospect for Russia of a weakened economy is bad news for Central Asian countries that have maintained close economic ties with the country.

The EBRD estimates that money sent home by citizens working in Russia accounts for between 5% and 30% of annual economic output in Armenia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Countries in the region rely on Russian banks for their connections to the global financial system, and much of their trade with other countries moves through Russia.

"They will need to reorient the flow of trade," said Ms. Javorcik. "Not just because Russia will be poorer and buying less, but also to reach other markets."

The EBRD lowered its growth forecasts for all but two of the 33 countries in which it invests beyond Ukraine, stretching across North Africa, Central Asia, the Caucasus and Central and Eastern Europe. The exceptions are Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, both of which are large producers of natural gas.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Ukraine eyes NATO-style security guarantee</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-proposal-for-nato-style-security-guarantee-greeted-with-skepticism-11648683375">https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-proposal-for-nato-style-security-guarantee-greeted-with-skepticism-11648683375</a>
GIST	<p>Western officials are balking at Ukraine's proposal for a NATO-style mutual-defense pledge that could draw their military forces into a war with Russia, even as they expressed some receptiveness to the idea of international security guarantees as part of a deal to end hostilities.</p> <p>At peace talks in Istanbul on Tuesday, Ukrainian negotiators handed Russia a detailed proposal of a neutral status for Ukraine with its security guaranteed by the U.S., U.K., France, Turkey, Germany, Canada, Poland and Israel. The Ukrainian proposal would ask countries to respond to a violation of its</p>



sovereignty the way members of North Atlantic Treaty Organization would act under Article 5, the alliance's mutual-defense promise.

"That's what we call Ukrainian NATO," said Ukrainian negotiator David Arakhamia, the majority leader in the country's parliament, in an interview in Istanbul. "So we get neutrality but our idea is to get fortified neutrality status."

President Biden has yet to comment on the proposal, but White House communications director Kate Bedingfield declined to say Wednesday whether the U.S. would be willing to serve as a security guarantor for Ukraine.

"We are in constant discussion with Ukrainians about ways that we can help ensure that they are sovereign and secure," she said. "But there is nothing specific about security guarantees that I can speak to at this time."

A number of Western leaders have expressed support for some form of security guarantees for Ukraine, yet none have articulated what those would look like. Their reluctance to embrace a key plank of Ukraine's blueprint—the notion of a NATO collective defense mechanism—shows how far apart all sides remain in finding a negotiated end to the war.

U.S. lawmakers also appeared skeptical of the proposal. Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, the No. 2 Senate Democrat and co-chair of Ukraine Caucus, said he thought the proposal was a "little premature," adding that he doesn't trust Russia.

Sen. Jim Risch of Idaho, the top Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said such a proposal might be possible, but would be a long way off. "You know, we already did that," said Mr. Risch, referring to the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, when Ukraine gave up nuclear weapons in exchange for security guarantees. "How's that working?"

U.K. Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab also expressed skepticism over a proposal to provide a security guarantee to a non-NATO member. "We'll consider anything [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelensky says he needs very carefully," Mr. Raab said Wednesday on BBC radio. "But we're not going to, I think, replicate unilaterally the NATO commitments that apply to NATO members."

Other countries named as possible guarantors of Ukraine's security expressed interest in the idea, but avoided committing to the proposal.

Germany's chancellor Olaf Scholz told Mr. Zelensky that Berlin was "broadly willing" to act as a security guarantor for Ukraine as part of a peace deal, a German government spokesman said Wednesday. It is, however, too early to discuss such commitments, government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit said.

A senior German government official later clarified that the discussion was in an early stage, and it included a proposal for a group of countries including Russia to guarantee Ukraine's security as part of a peace agreement under which Kyiv would declare independence of any military alliances, including NATO.

The German official said that the Ukrainian proposal was yet to be fleshed out, and that it could only work if Russia was part of it.

France is open to supporting a form of neutrality for Ukraine with its security guaranteed by several countries, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The person cautioned, however, that France is unwilling to sign up for a security guarantee that includes a mechanism similar to NATO's Article 5. Much will also depend on the details of Ukraine's neutrality, including the status of its national army, the person added.

Russia likely wouldn't agree to any arrangement that requires France and other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council to guarantee Ukraine's security, the person said.

Moscow's support would be required for any agreement to end the war, and it is unclear that the Kremlin would accept Kyiv's proposal. "No one said that the sides have made headway," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said of the talks in Istanbul, declining to discuss specific proposals. "We can't point to anything particularly promising."

The Ukrainian government, however, seems set on a proposal that would provide strong security guarantees from western countries.

"The activation mechanism is even stronger than NATO. In NATO if something happens you have to do the consultations first," said Mr. Arakhamia, the Ukrainian negotiator. "There is no mention of how long it might take. Considering how fast things are going on, we put 72 hours max. So within 72 hours, all the guarantors have to figure out what's going on, if it's aggression or special operation or war, they have to provide military assistance or armies."

Crimea and Donbas—two Ukrainian regions Russia occupies—wouldn't be a part of the guarantees, said Mr. Arakhamia. Those territories would be excluded until their status is settled in separate negotiations, he said.

Ukrainian officials proposed on Tuesday that the status of Donbas would be negotiated by the presidents of Ukraine and Russia, while Crimea would be subject to a 15-year period of negotiations on a separate track.

Ukraine first proposed Turkey, a NATO member, as a guarantor of its security on March 17. Turkey has good relations with Ukraine and has been playing a mediating role in the Russia-Ukraine crisis, hosting two rounds of peace talks.

The Turkish government hasn't endorsed or opposed the proposal but has offered broad support for the peace negotiations.

Turkey has also sold armed drones to Kyiv, which have played an instrumental role in Ukraine's resistance to Moscow's invasion, striking invading Russian convoys and mobile air defenses.

While Turkey has strongly condemned the Russian invasion, it has also chosen not to impose sanctions on Russia, opting to preserve its relationship with Moscow in order to act as a mediator.

Mr. Arakhamia said Israel, a non-NATO member, could also be a party to the proposed security guarantees.

"Potentially Israel because they also have a strong army. It's good for us to have expertise for this defensive country. They also have neutral status. They can mobilize their reserve army within one day I think," he said.

Israel appears unlikely, at least for now, to support the proposal.

"At this point, Israel is not in the position to provide a security guarantee to Ukraine," a senior Israeli official said. "We will be willing to assist in reaching an agreement through trust-building measures and other efforts."

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HEADLINE	03/31 Stocks futures rise, oil drops
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/global-stocks-markets-dow-update-03-31-2022-11648712506?mod=hp_lead_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/global-stocks-markets-dow-update-03-31-2022-11648712506?mod=hp_lead_pos1</a>

U.S. stock futures edged up and oil fell after reports that President Biden is preparing a substantial release of oil reserves to staunch soaring energy prices and inflation.

Futures tied to the S&P 500 added 0.1%, suggesting that the broad-market index may recoup some losses after it closed down 0.6% on Wednesday. Nasdaq-100 futures rose 0.4%, pointing to moderate gains for technology stocks after the opening bell.

Stocks are set to wrap up a volatile first quarter on a mixed note. Markets came under pressure as the invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 and Western sanctions on Russia drove concerns about disruptions to commodity supply chains and amplified inflation. This came at the same time as the Federal Reserve began raising interest rates. The S&P 500 fell into correction territory last month. The index staged a rebound in recent days, rising more than 5% this month but it is still down 3.4% for the quarter so far.

In recent days, investors have managed to stay calm in the face of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis, also overlooking fresh Covid-19 lockdowns in China. Instead, they are focusing on declining oil prices in hopes that inflation could ease.

President Biden is preparing to release up to 1 million barrels a day from strategic petroleum reserves and may announce it as soon as Thursday. That would be the largest release from strategic stocks in history, according to RBC Capital Markets. Oil prices declined with global benchmark Brent crude retreating 4.1% to trade at \$106.89 a barrel.

“This seems more like a concerted, more significant effort, one which might have a bit more weight to it. For markets, this means less inflation and less pressure for central banks to be aggressive with interest rate hikes,” said James Athey, an investment manager at Abrdn. “It’s about relief, potentially taking away a destabilizing element” that is caused by high oil prices.

The U.S. and allies have sought to bring down prices with strategic reserves previously, but effects have typically been short-lived. Members of the International Energy Agency agreed to release 60 million barrels on March 1, but Brent crude rose more than 7% that day.

The yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note ticked down to 2.318% from 2.357%, extending a three-day decline into a fourth day. Yields fall when prices rise. European government debt also rallied, with Germany’s 10-year yield falling below 0.6%.

Government bonds typically underperform in times of high inflation because the value of their fixed cash flows are eroded by rising prices. The 10-year Treasury yield is on track for the biggest quarterly jump since 1994.

The bond selloff stabilized in recent days likely due to timing, according to investors. At the end of the quarter, large asset managers commonly rebalance their portfolios.

A closely watched part of the U.S. yield curve, the difference between the 2-year yield and the 10-year yield narrowed to 0.03 percentage points on Thursday, from around 0.9 points in early January. If it goes negative, the yield curve would be inverted.

“For us, that would be a recessionary indicator, but I don’t think it’s time yet to panic,” said Arun Sai, a multiasset strategist at Pictet Asset Management. “We’re on the verge of a meaningful signal, but equally things can turn around.”

The latest data on personal income and consumer spending in the U.S. in February is expected to go out at 8:30 a.m. ET. Jobless claims, a proxy for layoffs, is also scheduled for 8:30 a.m. ET. Economists are expecting the claims level to stay close to last week’s level after it fell to the lowest point since 1969 last week amid a tight labor market.

	<p>Overseas, the pan-continental Stoxx Europe 600 edged up 0.1%. Swedish retailer H&amp;M tumbled more than 7% after its quarterly profit missed analysts' estimates due to higher costs.</p> <p>Russian stocks climbed 2.4% and the ruble strengthened 1% against the dollar. The currency traded at around 83 rubles to \$1, approaching its preinvasion level of 81.</p> <p>In Asia, most major benchmarks declined. The Shanghai Composite Index slid 0.5% and Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index fell 1.2%. Weaker than expected data from purchasing managers' surveys in China for March weighed on sentiment, investors said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 Covid outbreaks slow China factory activity</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-outbreaks-slow-factory-activity-in-china-11648712023?mod=hp_lead_pos6">https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-outbreaks-slow-factory-activity-in-china-11648712023?mod=hp_lead_pos6</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING—Activity in China's manufacturing and services sectors contracted in March, according to official surveys that offer the first broad glimpse of the economic cost of efforts to contain the highly transmissible Omicron variant in some of the country's most important industrial hubs.</p> <p>The surveys suggest output in China's powerhouse manufacturing sector shrank in March, as lockdowns hit factories in industrial districts ranging from Changchun in northeastern China to the southern technology hub of Shenzhen. Services-sector activity also tumbled, as Covid-19 and government efforts to smother it kept people away from malls, restaurants and hotels.</p> <p>Economists at Goldman Sachs estimate the regions experiencing the worst Covid-19 outbreaks account for around 30% of China's annual national output, underlining the strain the virus is putting on an economy already grappling with weakening overseas demand for its exports, surging commodity prices as the war in Ukraine roars on, and a homegrown property slump.</p> <p>Darkening the outlook further, the focus of China's efforts to combat the virus has shifted to Shanghai, China's most populous city, and a financial center that acts as a base for dozens of multinational corporations.</p> <p>Premier Li Keqiang on Wednesday reiterated the government's growth target for the year of around 5.5%, a goal many economists say increasingly appears to be out of reach.</p> <p>Economists say the severity of the damage will depend on how strict and how widespread restrictions get to contain the virus under China's zero-tolerance approach to Covid-19. "They are trying to keep it targeted, but evidently they are having to keep on tightening," said Craig Botham, chief China economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics in London.</p> <p>China's official purchasing managers index for the manufacturing sector dropped to 49.5 in March from 50.2 in February, the National Statistics Bureau said Thursday. The result matched the 49.5 median forecasts made by economists polled by The Wall Street Journal.</p> <p>A reading below 50 indicates activity is shrinking rather than expanding. March's result followed four straight months of expansion, after last contracting in October when factories were rocked by rising costs and power crunches.</p> <p>Factory production in areas hit by Covid-19 has been suspended or scaled back as lockdowns hit staffing and operations. Foxconn Technology Group, the biggest assembler of Apple Inc. iPhones, this month briefly halted operations at its factory in Shenzhen before slowly bringing it back up to full capacity over the course of almost a week. Tesla Inc. this week hit the pause button on production at its plant in Shanghai as authorities locked down the eastern half of the city to begin mass testing to weed out Covid-19 cases.</p>

	<p>To be sure, Chinese authorities have taken steps to try to minimize the disruption to industry from the latest round of restrictions, which may have helped stanch the slide in activity, economists say. Ports are still open and, with official encouragement, big employers such as Foxconn have been experimenting with “closed-loop” systems that keep staff overnight in dormitories during lockdowns to keep production humming.</p> <p>Yet Thursday’s data shows China’s manufacturers are facing a worsening international outlook, adding to the headwinds for the economy. A gauge of new export orders fell even further into contractionary territory, sinking to 47.2 in March from February’s 49.0.</p> <p>A purchasing managers index for nonmanufacturing sectors, which includes both services and construction activity in China, tumbled to 48.4 in March from 51.6 in February, as Covid restrictions hammered industries that involve close personal contact, such as railway and air transportation, catering and accommodation, the statistics bureau said.</p> <p>One brighter spot was construction, where activity rose in March as the weather improved and companies heeded Beijing’s call to expand infrastructure investment.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>03/30 Florida, Texas lead nation tech job gains</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/florida-texas-lead-nation-in-tech-job-gains-11648674042?mod=hp_lead_pos12">https://www.wsj.com/articles/florida-texas-lead-nation-in-tech-job-gains-11648674042?mod=hp_lead_pos12</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Technology workers continue to flock to companies far away from Silicon Valley as fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic reshapes workplaces, labor markets and the economy, employers and industry analysts say.</p> <p>Net tech employment in both Texas and Florida last year grew twice as fast as it did in California, including new software engineers, app developers and other tech workers entering the market, information-technology trade group CompTIA said in a report this week ahead of the Labor Department’s monthly jobs report Friday.</p> <p>Key attractions include more affordable housing markets, a lower cost of living and a ready availability of schools and other services. At the same time, the adoption of remote and hybrid work models at many companies has made tech jobs more portable.</p> <p>“There’s been a boom in tech jobs and it’s booming more outside California,” said Richard Florida, a professor at the University of Toronto’s School of Cities and Rotman School of Management.</p> <p>Jing Liao, chief administration officer at Solera Holdings Inc., an automotive-software maker based in Westlake, Texas, said the company has been expanding its tech team over the past several years. With tight job markets elsewhere, Ms. Liao said, she has had no trouble filling tech positions from a growing pool of local skilled workers.</p> <p>“We have found that Texas also has great school systems and has been producing more technology talent,” she added.</p> <p>Tech employment in Texas grew by 10,851 new jobs in 2021, more than any other state, followed by Florida with 10,522, CompTIA said.</p> <p>“Most of our recent hires live in Florida or Texas, two states that have experienced significant migration growth as a result of the pandemic,” said Terry Leeper, executive vice president and chief technology officer at Boca Raton, Fla.-based ODP Corp. , the parent company of retailer Office Depot.</p> <p>Mr. Leeper said the company is “significantly increasing” its product and technology and IT organizations, “and we are attracting talent from more established tech players.”</p>

Burger King, owned by Restaurant Brands International Inc. and based in Miami, has hired a “large talent pool of engineers, product managers, designers and other tech-centric roles in the Miami area,” according to a company spokesman. That includes tech veterans who have relocated from traditional hubs, like Silicon Valley and Seattle, with experience across large tech firms like Alphabet Inc.’s Google, Microsoft Corp. and Uber Technologies Inc., among others, the spokesman said.

While California remains home to the most tech workers in any one state—employing 1.4 million out of a nationwide total of 8.7 million—net tech employment last year grew by only 5,165 new workers, less than two hundred more than North Carolina, CompTIA said.

“California is a very difficult market to hire in right now, especially in tech,” said Megan Slabinski, a district president at recruiting firm Robert Half International Inc. “The cost of living is extremely high and there is tremendous competition from the tech giants located in Northern California, specifically the Bay Area,” Ms. Slabinski said.

U.S. employers across the country hired roughly 80,000 tech workers in 2021, up from 77,000 in 2020, according to the report. The gains reflect growing demand for technology services and infrastructure to support remote work, e-commerce or revamped supply chains in the wake of the disruption wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic, according to analysts.

Tim Herbert, CompTIA’s chief research officer, said that momentum is likely to strengthen this year, with U.S. employers adding 383,075 job postings for tech positions in March alone, up from 295,833 for the same month last year. “Generally, strong job posting volumes equate to a strong job market and hiring,” Mr. Herbert said about expected gains this month.

Much of the job growth tracked by CompTIA has been concentrated in a handful of metropolitan areas, led by Dallas; Austin, Texas; and Miami. “An innovative graduate student or startup that may have previously felt the need to relocate to Silicon Valley may now feel confident to launch and grow their tech business in any number of metro areas,” Mr. Herbert said.

A report by the Brookings Institution earlier this month found similar trends in tech hiring beyond traditional hubs like San Francisco, Seattle and New York.

“Accelerated digitalization during the pandemic, combined with remote work, has meant more places have seen more tech-sector employment,” said Mark Muro, a senior fellow and policy director at Brookings. “What’s more, firms’ insatiable need for digital talent has motivated many coastal firms to hire in the interior or move satellite offices there,” Mr. Muro said.

Business software giant Oracle Corp. in 2020 began moving its entire corporate headquarters to Austin, while Meta Platforms Inc.’s Facebook and Alphabet’s Google have both set up regional offices there.

The Draper Hero Institute, a research firm led by Silicon Valley venture capitalist Tim Draper, last year identified both Texas and Florida, along with Washington, as the nation’s top three states to launch a tech startup. The rankings were based on a range of local factors that typically support startup ecosystems, such as regulatory, economic, investment and workforce trends.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Boston limits protests near officials’ homes</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/boston-will-limit-protesting-near-officials-homes-after-picketing-over-covid-rules-11648666861?mod=hp_listb_pos2">https://www.wsj.com/articles/boston-will-limit-protesting-near-officials-homes-after-picketing-over-covid-rules-11648666861?mod=hp_listb_pos2</a>
GIST	<p>BOSTON—The Boston City Council voted to limit picketing at private residences after officials faced protests at homes over pandemic-related rules.</p> <p>The council, whose members are all Democrats, voted 9 to 4 in favor of an ordinance banning targeted residential picketing from 9 p.m. to 9 a.m. It was filed by Mayor Michelle Wu, who has had loud early-</p>

morning protesters outside her duplex since early January, when she announced a vaccine mandate for city employees.

Supporters said the restrictions on picketing hours are necessary to preserve quality of life for neighborhoods. “There has to be some civility,” said City Council President Ed Flynn. “Some respect for neighbors.”

Opponents said they worried about infringing on free speech.

Nine p.m. to 9 a.m. “is not a big deal, but I think it’s wrong,” said Councilor Frank Baker. “I think we’re encroaching on our right to protest.”

Numerous other cities and states, from Maine to Maryland to California, are passing or considering new rules as officials say Covid-related protests have turned into harassment.

Demonstrators have targeted homes over other issues as well. Environmental activists protested outside the home of Massachusetts’s Republican Gov. Charlie Baker last year. Protesters also targeted homes of big-city mayors after the killing of George Floyd in police custody—leading Chicago to enforce a statute banning picketing in residential neighborhoods.

In Boston, Ms. Wu was elected mayor in November and is the first woman and first person of color elected to lead the city. A proponent of public transportation who regularly rides the subway herself and maintains a social-media presence on Twitter, she has become a visible figure. But stepping in amid a Covid-19 surge, she has faced some battles. The city’s vaccine mandate is now tied up in court, and she is dealing with pushback over plans to charge North End restaurants a fee to continue outdoor dining that became popular during the pandemic.

The U.S. Supreme Court has held that laws banning protests targeted at homes are allowed as long as they are content-neutral and still allow demonstrators other avenues, such as marching through a neighborhood, according to the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Charges: China agent spied on dissidents</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-charges-chinese-agent-in-alleged-schemes-to-forcibly-repatriate-u-s-canadian-residents-11648685796?mod=hp_listb_pos5">https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-charges-chinese-agent-in-alleged-schemes-to-forcibly-repatriate-u-s-canadian-residents-11648685796?mod=hp_listb_pos5</a>
GIST	<p>Federal prosecutors accused a Chinese agent of illegally working with a local U.S. law-enforcement officer and others in an effort to forcibly repatriate U.S. and Canadian residents the Chinese government alleges are criminals.</p> <p>The complaint, unsealed Wednesday in Manhattan, follows charges unsealed two weeks ago in Brooklyn accusing Chinese agents of harassing Chinese dissidents living in the U.S., including by hiring a private investigator to use violence if necessary to end a candidate’s run for U.S. Congress.</p> <p>The latest complaint accuses Sun Hoi Ying of working with a New York-based law enforcement officer and private investigators in the U.S. to track down the Chinese targets. The complaint doesn’t identify the law-enforcement officer.</p> <p>“The defendant allegedly traveled to the United States and enlisted others, including a sworn law enforcement officer, to spy on and blackmail his victims,” said Assistant Attorney General for National Security Matthew Olsen. “Such conduct is both criminal and reprehensible.”</p> <p>Mr. Sun couldn’t be reached for comment and is thought by U.S. officials to be in China.</p> <p>“When conducting law enforcement cooperation with other countries, the Chinese law enforcement authorities strictly observe international law,” Liu Pengyu, a spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in</p>



Washington, D.C., said in a statement. He added, “The U.S. turns a blind eye to basic facts and smears Chinese efforts to repatriate corrupt fugitives and recover illegal proceeds.”

Prosecutors say that, from 2017 to 2022, Mr. Sun threatened and collected information on various people of Chinese descent whom Beijing has accused of economic crimes as part of a campaign known as Operation Fox Hunt.

In February 2017, Mr. Sun allegedly approached a social contact who is a U.S. citizen to help what he called the Chinese court find so-called fugitives so that lawsuits could be filed against them, the complaint says. Mr. Sun told his contact that their work would pave the way for a “standard operating procedure” through which the U.S. and China could cooperate, the complaint says. The two then worked with a U.S. private investigations firm, which the complaint doesn’t identify, to track down Fox Hunt targets.

In 2016, U.S. officials had sent a letter to their Chinese counterparts informing them not to seek out Fox Hunt targets without first making requests through the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the complaint says.

In 2020 The Wall Street Journal reported that Chinese entities had begun using civil lawsuits to pressure Fox Hunt targets to return to China, which U.S. officials said appeared to be an attempt to circumvent proper diplomatic and law-enforcement channels. The U.S. and China don’t have an extradition treaty.

In one of several alleged schemes, prosecutors say Chinese officials held hostage in China the daughter of one of Mr. Sun’s targets while she was pregnant, according to the complaint. Prosecutors say the pregnant woman, who is a U.S. citizen, was held for eight months to pressure one of her parents, a Fox Hunt target living in the U.S., to return to China. In May 2017, Chinese officials agreed to allow her to return to the U.S. if she carried Chinese government documents to the parent, who is a naturalized U.S. citizen, the complaint says.

In another alleged incident in December 2019, Mr. Sun tracked down and then met with a Fox Hunt target in Queens, New York in coordination with a co-conspirator whom prosecutors identified as a local U.S. law-enforcement officer. Mr. Sun threatened that the Chinese government would retaliate against the person if they didn’t comply with its demands, the complaint says.

In a separate incident in November 2019, prosecutors allege Mr. Sun hired an acquaintance to find another Fox Hunt target in Canada and twice traveled there to search for the person.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 US: Russia eyes Americans for harassment</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-singling-out-americans-for-harassment-state-dept-warns-11648682985?mod=hp_minor_pos10">https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-singling-out-americans-for-harassment-state-dept-warns-11648682985?mod=hp_minor_pos10</a>
GIST	<p>Russian authorities have “singled out” U.S. citizens in Russia for harassment, U.S. authorities said in a warning that underscores the physical and security risks companies still operating in the country face.</p> <p>Russian security services have targeted U.S. citizens for “detention and/or harassment,” the U.S. State Department on Tuesday said in an updated warning to Americans that cautions against all travel to the country.</p> <p>The State Department previously had warned that American private citizens engaged in business have been interrogated without cause and threatened by officials.</p> <p>Russian embassy officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>The reports of U.S. citizens being the particular targets of Russian authorities come amid a widespread flight of Western commercial interests and their staff from Russia, including professional services companies such as law and accounting firms that in some cases had been in the country for decades.</p>

International companies continuing to do business in Russia face an escalating regime of U.S. and European sanctions, which have drawn Russian reprisals.

Among the greatest fears multinational companies face is the risk that staff might be arrested and held on trumped-up charges, said Fred Burton, a former State Department counterterrorism deputy chief now at the protective software company Ontic Technologies Inc.

Though a company can buy insurance that provides assistance if an employee is kidnapped, an employee effectively taken hostage by a sovereign state can be difficult to free, he said. U.S. companies should assume their employees are being surveilled by Russian security services, and ideally, have any employees leave Russia immediately, he said.

“If I’m an American executive still inside of Russia, I would have left yesterday,” Mr. Burton said.

Even leaving the country can be complicated because of travel restrictions and the prospect that a contact might tip off Russian authorities to an executive’s imminent departure, triggering scrutiny from security agencies, said James Hayes, a former special agent with the Department of Homeland Security who now works as a consultant for Guidepost Solutions LLC.

“You have to identify sources within that country that are trustworthy, that are not going to basically pick a higher bidder to tell the Russian government or anti-American forces where business people might be traveling,” Mr. Hayes said. “Very difficult, very tense situation.”

In recent years, Russia has prosecuted several U.S. citizens under varying circumstances. In 2020, Paul Whelan, a former director of global security for auto-parts supplier BorgWarner Inc. and a Marine veteran, was found guilty of spying and sentenced to 16 years in prison in a case that drew U.S. condemnation. That same year, another marine veteran, Trevor Reed, was sentenced to nine years for allegedly assaulting two Russian police officers, though his parents have said the charges were fabricated.

And this year, a week before Russia’s most recent invasion of Ukraine, WNBA basketball star Brittney Griner, who also plays for a Russian team, was arrested on drug charges and has been detained since.

In a case outside Russia also widely regarded as “hostage diplomacy,” two Canadian businessmen—Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig—were arrested in China in December 2018, just over a week after Canadian police arrested Huawei Technologies Co. Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou at the request of U.S. authorities, who accused her of bank fraud.

The men were freed in September of last year after Ms. Meng made a deal with prosecutors.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Russia lacks military sophistication</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/30/russia-camouflage-ukraine/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/30/russia-camouflage-ukraine/</a>
GIST	<p>Russian troops in Ukraine have scrambled to avoid detection and attack by using tree branches and straw, even swaths of carpeting, to conceal tanks and other armored vehicles, in what analysts call a surprising lack of sophistication for such an advanced military and further evidence of how ill-prepared some commanders were for the sustained fight that has unfolded.</p> <p>Camouflage, whether for personnel or equipment, is a fundamental part of warfighting, even as technological advances such as drones, satellite imagery and infrared scopes have made it harder to hide on modern battlefields. It works by distorting shapes and reducing heat signatures, in effect fooling the eye to create doubt and confusion.</p> <p>Yet to some observers who’ve closely tracked the conflict in Ukraine, Russian forces, despite their military superiority, have exhibited a breathtaking degree of amateurism. They point to videos circulating on social media showing an array of contrivances.</p>

In one, purportedly captured mid-firefight by a Russian soldier seeking cover amid a cluster of idling armored transports, a patchwork of what appear to be pine saplings is visible along one of the vehicle's flanks. It's a sight that "smacks of desperation," said Mike Jason, a retired U.S. Army armor officer who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

U.S. military tactical procedure, Jason noted, is to shroud entire vehicles with lightweight camouflage netting when they're not moving, even if it's only for short durations. Ukrainian units have been seen using combinations of netting and foliage to help break up the shape of armored vehicle hulls. Pine saplings, Jason assessed, are "better than nothing," but would seem to indicate the unit involved lacks a basic competence for using camouflage or simply didn't have the right equipment to begin with.

Other imagery to emerge from Ukraine shows armored transports with what resembles barnyard hay strewn across their tops. In still another video shared on social media, Russian troops can be seen covering a vehicle with rugs or another type of heavy cloth.

This could be an attempt, Jason surmised, to reduce or distort heat signatures, which antiarmor weapons — like the U.S.-manufactured Javelin missiles being supplied to Ukraine — use to lock onto their targets. An altered signature could make it more challenging for a gunner to distinguish between a Russian armored vehicle and a civilian car, though a trained scout would oscillate between a thermal scope and binoculars to pick up other evidence of enemy activity, he noted.

The U.S. military is emerging from its own complacency after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where vehicle camouflage in a fight against insurgents was often an afterthought. New training indicates a return to fundamentals like using camouflage netting, Jason said. Netting and other fabrics can help with concealment, and using foliage to distort the contours of vehicles can help give crews vital seconds to react to an engagement or attack themselves. But they are of limited use in the age of drones and satellite imagery, Jason said, making camouflage an endeavor meant mostly to deceive human eyes.

The Russians' apparent lack of modern camouflage netting is the latest example in what analysts call a string of tactical missteps since the invasion began late last month, affirming beliefs in the United States and in Europe that President Vladimir Putin and his senior military commanders failed to anticipate the strong resistance their troops have faced.

To the bewilderment of many Western observers, Russian soldiers have shown a tendency to speak on unsecured radios and cellphones, allowing enemy intelligence to intercept their communications. Military planners also have failed to distribute enough fuel and food, prompting troops to abandon vehicles in place and, in some cases, surrender.

Just as confounding, analysts say, is that Russian units are in fact versed in camouflaging their vehicles, and there is evidence they have done so in past military exercises. As recently as 2018, Russian state media touted its military's advanced camouflage prototypes, which it said were capable of duplicating environmental surroundings.

Rob Lee, a Russian military expert and a senior fellow with the Foreign Policy Research Institute, said the uneven use of camouflage in Ukraine may point to commanders' lack of preparation and guidance to subordinates, or attest to their overconfidence from the outset that this fight would be easy and that the Ukrainian government would fall quickly.

It has become clear, Lee said, that commercial and smaller tactical drones provided to the Ukrainians by Turkey are enabling them to spot Russian units for artillery and airstrikes, potentially prompting some to resort to ad hoc solutions such as outfitting their vehicles with bits of shrubbery or simply taking them off road and hiding among the trees.

"Russia," he added, "doesn't have a good response."

HEADLINE	03/30 Major jewelers ditching Russia diamonds
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/31/major-jewellers-to-cease-buying-russian-origin-diamonds-after-increased-scrutiny">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/31/major-jewellers-to-cease-buying-russian-origin-diamonds-after-increased-scrutiny</a>
GIST	<p>Major jewellers are ditching Russian diamonds after facing increased scrutiny over how Russia's state-controlled diamond monopoly could fund Putin's war on Ukraine.</p> <p>A host of high-profile international jewellers, including American brand Tiffany &amp; Co, Swiss watch and jewellery-maker Chopard, Signet, the largest retailer of diamond jewellery, and Pandora, the world's largest jeweller, have released statements saying they will stop buying diamonds of Russian origin.</p> <p>In mid-march, the Guardian reported on growing concerns that trade with Russia's partly state-owned diamond miner was lining Russian state coffers, and could be funding Russia's invasion of Ukraine; as well how jewellers could easily – and legally – circumnavigate sanctions by buying Russian stones processed through India. In the days since, multiple major retailers said they would stop sourcing Russian diamonds. This week, Pandora and Chopard were the latest to announce the move, with both saying they had instructed all suppliers to stop sourcing raw materials of Russian origin. They followed moves by Tiffany and Signet earlier in March.</p> <p>Russia produces about 30% of the world's diamonds – 98% of which are mined and sold by Alrosa, an enormous mining monopoly with close ties to the Kremlin. A third of Alrosa is owned by the central government, and another third by regional governments – the Russian republic of Yakutia and its administrations. The company brings in significant profits for its government shareholders, reporting sales of \$4.16bn in 2021, resulting in a net profit of 91bn rubles (\$943m). Putin has said in the past that it “gives serious revenues to the federal budget and regional budget”.</p> <p>Both the US and UK have introduced sanctions forbidding companies from doing direct business with Alrosa. The sanctions alone, however, are unlikely to stop the flow of Russian diamonds to the west, because the vast majority are exported rough to India, where they are cut and polished. Under US customs rulings, this is considered a “significant transformation” – so polished diamonds can be legally imported as an Indian product, not a Russian one.</p> <p>Decisions over whether to truly pause trade of Alrosa's diamonds will therefore fall to the industry, and to key certification bodies. Within the sector, however, a storm has been brewing over “responsible sourcing” groups that have remained quiet on sourcing of Russian diamonds, with multiple high-profile members resigning in protest.</p> <p>The Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC) – one of the crucial jewellery watchdogs – was set up to help regulate the sector, improve its reputation, promote responsible sourcing, and eliminate “conflict diamonds” from supply chains. The Guardian reported earlier in March that the council had been accused of silence over Russian diamonds although it has issued guidance that members should comply with sanctions. While Alrosa has stepped down from the organisation's board, it remains a member and has kept its “responsible” certification. The council has a number of past or present long-term Alrosa customers on its board.</p> <p>Now, the council is facing a wave of exits. Brands that have announced they are leaving over the Russian diamonds issue include Pandora, Richemont, the owner of Cartier, and Kering, the owner of high-fashion brands including Gucci and Saint Laurent. On Wednesday, the organisation's executive director Iris Van der Veken resigned over its handling of the issue. Van der Veken declined to comment.</p> <p>In a statement, Richemont, the owner of Cartier, said it was leaving the organisation in protest. “Richemont and its maisons do not wish to be members of an industry organisation that includes companies that contribute to financing conflicts and wars.”</p>

Pandora representatives said the company was leaving the council after 12 years as a member, over its “failure to suspend Russian companies’ memberships and responsible business certifications and urge its members to suspend business with Russia. Pandora had previously requested that RJC take such actions.”

“The war requires all businesses to act with the utmost responsibility regarding any interactions or business dealings with Russia and Belarus. Pandora cannot in good faith be a member of an association that does not share our values,” chief executive Alexander Lacik said.

Gucci and Balenciaga owner Kering said the brand “does not want to be associated in any way with business practices that contribute to an endorsement of war.”

“The RJC is at a crucial crossroads,” said Cristina Villegas, director of the Mines to Markets program at development organisation Pact. “The current definitions of responsibility are silent on what happens when a company’s assets are being used to directly and indirectly fund an unprovoked conflict that’s displaced millions of people.”

RJC chair David A. Bouffard said in a statement that the council had “commenced an arm’s length, independent, third-party legal assessment ... to consider the status of Alrosa as an RJC member”.

“The pace of this process may be frustrating, but this is an unprecedented situation, which is constantly changing and requires that the time be taken, to ensure that due process is followed as exhaustively as possible.” Bouffard said the process would conclude “imminently”.

Brad Brooks-Rubin, strategic adviser to the council, said the exodus of members was significant for the industry. “If the current trajectory continues and more members [leave]... there’s not another competing organisation in the industry,” he said. “That leaves the jewellery industry exposed to real concerns about: what standards are you implementing? What does it mean to be responsible, sustainable, ethical? The RJC has provided that – and if it’s not the RJC, what takes its place?”

Brooks-Rubin had spoken out earlier in March to criticise the lack of action or transparency on Russian diamonds, saying the council’s action against Alrosa had been “insufficient”. He said decisions about boycotting diamond-producing countries were complex, with millions of international jobs and livelihoods depending on the flow of diamonds.

“If 30-40% of the supply chain is off the market, then that affects everybody. That affects prices, that affects the supply chain, that affects every entity in the entire industry.” He said the council needed to be clear and transparent about the challenges it faced.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 Day 36 of the Russia invasion</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/31/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-36-of-the-russian-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/31/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-36-of-the-russian-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>The Russian defence ministry announced a local ceasefire on Thursday to allow civilians to be evacuated from Ukraine’s besieged port city of Mariupol</b>, according to Agence France-Presse. A humanitarian corridor from Mariupol to Zaporizhzhia, via the Russian-controlled port of Berdiansk, would be opened from 10am (7am GMT), the ministry said on Wednesday.</li><li>• <b>Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has warned that <a href="#">Russia</a> is massing its forces for a big offensive in the eastern region of Donbas</b>. He said Ukraine was “prepared” for it and added that any Russian withdrawal of troops from around Kyiv had been forced by the fierce resistance of Ukrainian troops.</li><li>• <b>Russia and Ukraine will resume online peace talks on Friday 1 April</b>. A senior Ukraine official said leaders of the two countries, Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskiy, <a href="#">could meet “soon”</a>, but the Kremlin downplayed hopes of an early breakthrough. Ukraine’s president said in a televised address to the nation on Wednesday that “for the moment there are just words, nothing concrete”.</li></ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Zelenskiy said he talked to Joe Biden for an hour on another “very active diplomatic day”</b>, thanking the US president for a new \$1bn humanitarian aid package and an additional \$500m in direct budget support. Zelenskiy said: “The support of the United States is vital for us. And now it is especially important to lend a hand to Ukraine, to show all the power of the democratic world.”</li> <li>• <b>Russian shelling continued on Wednesday despite Moscow saying on Tuesday that it would scale back its attacks</b> around Kyiv and the northern city of Chernihiv. However, reports citing the Pentagon said that Russian forces were “walking away” from the <a href="#">Chernobyl nuclear plant</a>.</li> <li>• <b>UK, US and EU officials say Putin has been misled over Russian military performance.</b> <a href="#">Putin has received misinformation</a> about how well Russia is doing and how much the sanctions have affected the country because some of those closest to him are afraid to tell him the truth, according to a speech planned by the head of Britain’s GCHQ spy service on Thursday.</li> <li>• <b>Sir Jeremy Fleming is also expected to say that some Russian soldiers are refusing to carry out orders</b>, and that they are poorly equipped and have low morale.</li> <li>• <b>Global restrictions on exports of industrial components to Russia have hit car and tank production.</b> A carmaker has shut down and tank production has halted, according to the US.</li> <li>• <b>Liz Truss, Britain’s foreign secretary, is due to land in India on Thursday to urge Narendra Modi’s government to reduce its strategic dependency on Russia.</b> Her arrival in New Delhi <a href="#">coincides with that of her sparring partner Sergei Lavrov, Russia’s foreign minister</a>, who will be making his first visit since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.</li> <li>• <b>The UK has announced new laws targeting the access of Russian oligarchs</b> to “UK aviation and maritime technical services”, according to the Foreign Office.</li> <li>• <b>Eight Russian oligarchs on the UK sanctions list over their links to Vladimir Putin were granted “golden visas” to live in Britain.</b> The individuals were granted the right to live in the UK after promising to invest at least £2m under the controversial tier 1 investor visa scheme, <a href="#">the UK government has admitted</a>.</li> <li>• <b>Russian hackers have recently attempted to penetrate the networks of Nato and the militaries of some eastern European countries</b>, according to a report by Google’s threat analysis group. The report did not say which militaries had been targeted in what Google described as “credential phishing campaigns” launched by a Russian-based group called Coldriver, or Callisto.</li> <li>• <b>Slovakia has said it will expel 35 Russian diplomats based on information provided by intelligence services.</b> Fellow EU countries Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland and the Czech Republic have all announced the expulsion of Russian diplomats suspected of spying.</li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	03/30 Day 35 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/30/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-35-of-the-russian-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/30/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-35-of-the-russian-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Western and Ukrainian officials have reacted warily to Russia’s claim that it will significantly cut back its military activity in northern Ukraine</b> after “meaningful” progress at peace talks in Istanbul. More than a month after the start of an invasion that has largely stalled in the eyes of the west, Russia’s deputy defence minister, Alexander Fomin, <a href="#">said Moscow would “radically reduce military activity in the direction of Kyiv and Chernihiv”</a>.</li> <li>• <b>Volodymyr Zelenskiy said the talks had been “positive but they do not drown out the explosions of Russian shells”</b>, adding that Ukraine had no intention of reducing its military efforts. Joe Biden said: “I don’t read anything into it until I see what their actions are.” The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said he had not seen anything indicating that talks were progressing in a “constructive way” and suggested Russian indications of a pullback could be an attempt by Moscow to “deceive people and deflect attention”. “What Russia says, and what Russia does, and we’re focused on the latter.”</li> <li>• <b>Moscow’s lead negotiator, Vladimir Medinsky, said Russia’s promise to “drastically reduce” military operations does not represent a ceasefire.</b> In an interview with the Russian state-owned Tass news agency, Medinsky said <a href="#">there is still “a long way to go”</a> to reach a mutual agreement with Ukraine.</li> </ul>

- Following Russia's announcement, [two senior US officials said](#) the US was seeing Russia beginning to withdraw some of its forces from the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, in what it believes is a "major" change in Russian strategy. Another US official said any movement of Russian forces from around Kyiv [would constitute a "redeployment, not a withdrawal"](#).
- The UK has also seen signs of "some reduction" in Russian bombardment around Kyiv, Downing Street said. But it insisted [the UK will judge tentative steps towards a possible peace deal by actions rather than words](#). "We don't want to see anything less than a complete withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukrainian territory," the PM's spokesperson said. The UK's Ministry of Defence (MoD) said in its latest updated that "it is almost certain that the Russian offensive has failed in its objective to encircle Kyiv".
- Ukraine called for "an international mechanism of security guarantees" similar to Nato's article 5, which commits alliance members to defend one another. The senior Ukrainian presidential adviser, Mykhailo Podolyak, said [the guarantee would involve countries such as the US, UK, Turkey, France and Germany](#) being "legally actively involved in protecting [Ukraine] from any aggression".
- Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu said Moscow's "main goal" in Ukraine was now the "liberation" of the Donbas region. In a sign that [Moscow may be switching to more limited objectives](#) after facing fierce Ukrainian resistance in the first month of the war, Shoigu claimed the "main tasks of the first stage of the operation have been completed".
- A Russian airstrike hit a government building in the southern Ukrainian port city of Mykolaiv on Tuesday, destroying a large portion of the structure and leaving people trapped under debris. [At least 12 people were killed and 22 injured](#), Ukraine's emergencies agency said.
- The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) called on Russia and Ukraine to reach a clear agreement for the safe evacuation of civilians from the besieged city of Mariupol and other frontline places as vital supplies run out. ["Time is running out" for people in Mariupol](#), it warned, adding that there was still a lack of "concrete agreements" for the safe passage and evacuations of civilians in the southern Ukrainian city.
- The Kremlin dismissed reports that Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich suffered symptoms consistent with poisoning during an informal round of talks earlier this month. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov [said the reports were false and "part of the information war"](#).
- A Ukrainian soldier who told a Russian warship to "go fuck yourself" while defending an island has been awarded for his services, local authorities said. Roman Hrybov was serving on Snake Island – known as Zmiinyi Island in Ukrainian – [when it came under Russian air and sea bombardment on 24 February](#). Ukraine's defence ministry said Hrybov was released from Russian captivity and is now home in Cherkasy.
- A £38m superyacht owned by an unnamed Russian businessman has been detained in Canary Wharf in London as part of sanctions against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine. The vessel, known as Phi, is subject to [the first detention of a superyacht in UK waters](#), the National Crime Agency (NCA) said, and its owner was "deliberately well hidden". The company to which the ship is registered is based in the islands of Saint Kitts and Nevis and it carried Maltese flags to hide its origins, the NCA said. The owner is understood not to be an individual facing sanctions.

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HEADLINE	03/29 Day 34 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/29/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-34-of-the-russian-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/29/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-34-of-the-russian-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Ukraine</a> and Russia met for four hours in Istanbul for a fresh round of peace talks, with Kyiv seeking a ceasefire without compromising on its sovereignty or territorial integrity. Both sides played down hopes of an early breakthrough.</li> <li>• Turkey's president, <a href="#">Recep Tayyip Erdoğan</a>, opened the talks – the two delegations' first face-to-face meeting in more than a fortnight – at the Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul, urging both sets of negotiators to "put an end to this tragedy".</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich was in attendance</b> – and talks started with “a cold welcome and no handshake”.</li> <li>• <b>The International Committee of the Red Cross called on <a href="#">Ukraine</a> and Russia to reach a clear agreement for the safe evacuation of civilians</b> from the besieged southern Ukrainian city of Mariupol and other places as vital supplies run out.</li> <li>• <b>Robert Mardini</b>, ICRC director general, said the neutral aid agency would not participate in any forced evacuations of civilians from Ukraine and it had no first-hand information that this is happening. He also said there was a “disinformation campaign” against the ICRC on social media.</li> <li>• <b>Ukraine hopes to open three humanitarian corridors to evacuate civilians from besieged towns and cities today</b>, deputy prime minister <b>Iryna Vereshchuk</b> said.</li> <li>• The main government building in <b>Mykolaiv</b> in <a href="#">Ukraine</a> has been struck and damaged by a missile strike. There are no reports of fatalities but eight people are said to be trapped under the rubble.</li> <li>• <b>Russia’s defence ministry</b> has claimed it has destroyed a major fuel depot in Ukraine’s <b>Rivne</b> region.</li> <li>• The <b>UK’s Ministry of Defence</b> released its latest intelligence report on the situation unfolding in <a href="#">Ukraine</a>, <b>claiming Ukrainian forces are continuing to conduct localised counterattacks outside Kyiv</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Ukraine’s military also released its latest operational <a href="#">report</a></b> as of 6am this morning and appears to corroborate with British intelligence, claiming its forces carried out successful counterattacks in some directions.</li> <li>• <b>Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy</b>, urged for sanctions packages to be “effective and substantial” and called for countries to keep supplying weapons to Ukraine. “Ukrainians should not die just because someone cannot find enough courage to hand over the necessary weapons to <a href="#">Ukraine</a>,” he said. “Fear always makes you an accomplice.”</li> <li>• Ukraine’s foreign minister <b>Dmytro Kuleba</b> has tweeted to call upon states around the world to criminalise the use of the “Z” symbol as a way to publicly support Russia’s war of aggression.</li> <li>• <b>Finland’s</b> security service said it expects neighbouring Russia to mount a campaign of disinformation over the coming months to influence the Nordic nation’s debate over joining Nato.</li> <li>• The Russian foreign ministry is <b>summoning ambassadors from the Baltic states</b> to announce the expulsion of diplomats.</li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 Russia gas to be paid in rubles?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/31/why-is-vladimir-putin-demanding-russian-gas-is-paid-for-in-roubles">https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/31/why-is-vladimir-putin-demanding-russian-gas-is-paid-for-in-roubles</a>
GIST	<p>Vladimir Putin has demanded payment in roubles for Russian gas sold to “unfriendly” countries, setting a deadline of 31 March.</p> <p>It is not clear whether he plans to tear up existing contracts that set the price in euros or dollars, but Germany, which relies on Russia for 40% of its gas supplies, is not taking any chances, warning large industrial gas users that a standoff is possible and rationing is one possible outcome.</p> <p>Here we ask why payment for Russian exports in roubles has become a major issue for the Kremlin, and whether Putin could extend the plan to include exports of oil, grain, fertilisers, coal, metals and other key commodities.</p> <p><b>Why does Putin want payment in roubles?</b></p> <p>In the aftermath of the Russian invasion the value of the rouble fell off a cliff. It fell from about 85 to the euro last year to 110 as the tanks rolled across Ukraine’s borders. Only an intervention by the Russian central bank it stood at 94.1 to the euro.</p>

With the rouble trading at such low levels, Russian exports were going to bring in less money to subsidise state services and fund the war than previously expected.

A higher valued rouble will not only bring in more cash, it is also a matter of pride that trading nations are prepared to pay for Russian exports in the Russian currency. A larger pool of roubles, generated by the demand from foreign countries and companies for Russian goods, would allow Moscow to challenge the US dominance, via the dollar, of global money markets, although it is not clear why China would support such a plan.

Some analysts have also speculated that dollars and euros are less useful to Moscow while sanctions are tightening. For instance, without access to dollars and euros via international exchanges, Russia is also proposing to pay the interest on its euro-denominated debts with roubles.

### **Which countries does Putin expect to pay for gas in roubles?**

Russia's list of "unfriendly" countries corresponds to those that have imposed sanctions. Deals with companies and individuals from those countries must be approved by a government commission.

The countries include the US, EU member states, the UK, Japan, Canada, Norway, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland and Ukraine. Some, including the US and Norway, do not buy Russian gas.

### **How big are Russian exports to the EU?**

In 2020, the EU was Russia's primary trade partner, accounting for 37.3% of the country's total trade in goods with the world. Meanwhile, Russia was the EU's fifth largest trade partner, representing 5.8% of the bloc's total trade. However, this disguises the important fact that Russian gas is a major feature of those imports, most of which is paid for in dollars, euros or sterling.

According to Gazprom, 58% of its sales of natural gas to Europe and other countries as of 27 January were settled in euros. US dollars accounted for about 39% of gross sales and sterling about 3%. Commodities traded worldwide are largely transacted in dollars or euros, which together make up roughly 80% of worldwide currency reserves.

In practical terms, while gas imports to the EU from Russia are volatile, they account for up to €800m (£680m) of spending every day.

### **How has Putin exercised his influence?**

It wasn't enough for Russia's central bank to buy roubles to prop up the currency in its darkest hours after the invasion. An effective ban on the central bank using the Swift payments system to access its assets held overseas meant this intervention could not last.

The central bank wanted to sell dollar and euro investments to buy roubles, increasing demand and consequently the price, but without access to Swift was unable to continue on a sufficient scale.

Another route was found. A directive was slapped on exporters, including commodity producers, forcing them to convert into roubles 80% of the foreign currency they receive on export sales.

Now the Kremlin is considering plans for all export sales to be in roubles, exploiting its near monopoly in the essential raw materials in manufacturing processes, from fertilisers to cars.

One example is nickel, which car companies use to make catalytic converters. About 40% of the world's supply of the metal comes from Russia and 90% of Russia's output goes to the car industry, says Paul Watters, the head of corporate research at S&P Global Ratings.

If carmakers are forced to choose between buying nickel in roubles or looking elsewhere for supplies, it is likely politicians, keen to isolate Russia, will tell them to look elsewhere. Watters fears rationing and car factory closures could be the result.

### Could the plan backfire?

If the Kremlin insists current contracts in euros and dollars are changed to roubles, they will be in breach of international protocols. This is not something Gazprom has invoked, even during the cold war when tensions were heightened between the Soviet Union and the west.

Germany has said it is prepared to ration energy supplies rather than pay for gas in roubles, which is likely to plunge the EU's largest economy into recession but deny Russia the extra cash. The Kremlin move is also likely to hasten a switch away from Russian commodities, adding to the country's already-dramatic economic decline.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 Plea for Solomon Islands rethink China deal</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/31/pacific-leader-urges-solomon-islands-to-rethink-china-security-deal">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/31/pacific-leader-urges-solomon-islands-to-rethink-china-security-deal</a>
GIST	<p>The president of the Federated States of Micronesia has sent an impassioned plea to the Solomon Islands' prime minister, urging him to reconsider a controversial and "unprecedented" security pact with China.</p> <p>President David Panuelo voiced "grave security concerns about this proposed agreement" in a 30 March letter released by his government on Thursday, citing rising tensions between China and the United States.</p> <p>"My fear is that we – the Pacific islands – would be at the epicentre of a future confrontation between these major powers," Panuelo wrote.</p> <p>A leaked draft of the wide-ranging security agreement sparked rebuke from the United States, Australia and New Zealand last week because it would allow Chinese security and naval deployments to the Solomon Islands.</p> <p>The Solomon Islands' prime minister, Manasseh Sogavare, dismissed critics of the deal in a fiery speech on Tuesday, saying it was "very insulting... to be branded as unfit to manage our sovereign affairs" by other nations.</p> <p>In his letter to Sogavare, Panuelo asked the Solomons leader to consider the long-term consequences "for the entire Pacific region, if not the entire world" of signing the security pact.</p> <p>He voiced concern about the Pacific becoming "collateral damage" in a potential conflict between the United States and China, saying the region could be transformed into "the playground for children playing as adults".</p> <p>Panuelo lamented the regional schism as nations lined up behind China and the United States: "Wouldn't it be terrific if they could see that the troubles of our times, such as climate change, require all of them working in concert instead of against each other?"</p> <p>But he urged Sogavare to be pragmatic, given the rising tensions between the major powers and their allies.</p> <p>Australia's Chief of Joint Operations Lieutenant General Greg Bilton said on Thursday that the China-Solomon Islands pact – which is yet to be signed – would "change the calculus" of his country's operations in the Pacific.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 US intelligence: advisers misinformed Putin</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/europe/putin-advisers-ukraine.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/europe/putin-advisers-ukraine.html</a>
GIST	WASHINGTON — President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has been misinformed by his advisers about the Russian military's struggles in Ukraine, according to declassified U.S. intelligence.

The intelligence, according to multiple U.S. officials, shows what appears to be growing tension between Mr. Putin and the Ministry of Defense, including with the Russian defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, who was once among the most trusted members of the Kremlin's inner circle.

Speaking in Algiers, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken acknowledged Mr. Putin had been given less than truthful information from his advisers.

“With regard to President Putin, look, what I can tell you is this, and I said this before, one of the Achilles' heels of autocracies is that you don't have people in those systems who speak truth to power or who have the ability to speak truth to power,” Mr. Blinken said. “And I think that is something that we're seeing in Russia.”

In a news conference on Wednesday afternoon, a Pentagon spokesman, John F. Kirby, said that the Defense Department believed that Mr. Putin has not had access to an accurate account of his army's failures in Ukraine.

“We would concur with the conclusion that Mr. Putin has not been fully informed by his Ministry of Defense, at every turn over the last month,” Mr. Kirby said.

“If Mr. Putin is misinformed or uninformed about what's going on inside Ukraine, it's his military, it's his war, he chose it,” Mr. Kirby said. “And so the fact that he may not have all the context — that he may not fully understand the degree to which his forces are failing in Ukraine, that's a little disconcerting, to be honest with you.”

Other American officials have said that Mr. Putin's rigid isolation during the pandemic and willingness to publicly rebuke advisers who do not share his views have created a degree of wariness, or even fear, in senior ranks of the Russian military. Officials believe that Mr. Putin has been getting incomplete or overly optimistic reports about the progress of Russian forces, creating mistrust with his military advisers.

Mr. Putin seemed genuinely unaware that the Russian military had been using conscripts in Ukraine, and that drafted soldiers were among those killed in action, according to the U.S. officials. Mr. Putin's ignorance showed “a clear breakdown in the flow of accurate information to the Russian president,” according to a U.S. official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the declassified, but still sensitive, material. There “is now persistent tension” between Mr. Putin and the Defense Ministry, the official said.

The American intelligence assessment also said that Mr. Putin had an incomplete understanding about how damaging Western sanctions had been on the Russian economy, officials said.

The war continues to go poorly for Russian forces. Ukraine's military has not only held its own but also begun counterattacking. Some U.S. officials believe that senior Russian officials are wary of delivering truthful assessments — potentially afraid that the messengers of bad news will be held responsible for the battlefield failures.

The Russian military's stumbles have eroded trust between Mr. Putin and his Ministry of Defense. While Mr. Shoigu had been considered one of the few advisers Mr. Putin confided in, the prosecution of the war in Ukraine has damaged the relationship.

Mr. Putin has put two top intelligence officials under house arrest for providing poor intelligence ahead of the invasion, something that may have further contributed to the climate of fear.

With evidence of Mr. Putin's frustration growing, the United States has in recent weeks been building up an intelligence case that he had not been getting accurate assessments from the Ministry of Defense and other senior officials. The U.S. officials believe that Mr. Putin is continuing to be misled and that senior advisers are unwilling to tell the truth.

	<p>What American intelligence sources there might be in the Kremlin is a tightly held secret. But since Russia began its troop buildup along Ukraine's borders last year, U.S. intelligence officials have accurately predicted Mr. Putin's moves.</p> <p>The declassified information was reported earlier on Wednesday by The Associated Press.</p> <p>Russian forces announced a shift in their posture around Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, on Tuesday, though American officials voiced skepticism that Russia was stopping its attacks as a peace gesture. Rather, some believe the moves are a further sign that Russia is adjusting its failing strategy. It is also possible that the shifting strategy is a sign of dysfunction and miscommunication in the upper ranks of the Russian Defense Ministry.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Russia negotiator, Moscow rhetoric divided</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/europe/russia-ukraine-peace-talks.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/europe/russia-ukraine-peace-talks.html</a>
GIST	<p>ISTANBUL — Russia's lead negotiator said on Wednesday that peace talks with Ukraine appeared to be on the verge of a breakthrough, even as other officials voiced skepticism and pro-Kremlin commentators heaped scorn on the talks — mixed messages that underscored the lack of clarity over President Vladimir V. Putin's goals in the invasion and the uncertainty over whether progress in the talks was real.</p> <p>The Kremlin's chief negotiator, Vladimir Medinsky, read a statement broadcast on state television that described Ukraine's proposal on Tuesday to declare neutrality as a core concession to Russia, just hours after the Kremlin's spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, said that the talks in Istanbul had produced nothing "very promising."</p> <p>In the broadcast, Mr. Medinsky said, "Yesterday, the Ukrainian side for the first time outlined its readiness, in writing, to fulfill a number of important conditions for building normal and, I hope, good neighborly relations with Russia."</p> <p>He listed a series of concessions, like refusing to host foreign troops, that he said Ukraine was prepared to make. "If these conditions are fulfilled, then the threat of a NATO bridgehead being created on Ukrainian territory will be liquidated," Mr. Medinsky said.</p> <p>He said Russia was determined to keep negotiating, and Mykhailo Podolyak, a member of Ukraine's delegation in Istanbul, said the talks had yielded "proof of the viability of Ukrainian statehood."</p> <p>"The revision of global security principles &amp; the role of institutions begins," Mr. Podolyak said on Twitter.</p> <p>The positive language from the negotiators clashed markedly with hard-line rhetoric coming out of Moscow, where supporters of the war decried Mr. Medinsky's diplomacy as bordering on traitorous.</p> <p>"Any talks with Nazis before your boot is on their throat are perceived as weakness," Vladimir Solovyov, a popular state television host, said on his YouTube show, reprising the Kremlin's false characterization of the Ukrainian government as "Nazis." "You cannot meet with them or talk to them."</p> <p>And Mr. Peskov, the Kremlin's spokesman, was far more cautious than Mr. Medinsky in his comments earlier Wednesday. He said that Ukraine's willingness to put some proposals in writing was a "positive factor," but that there was little progress to report otherwise.</p> <p>"We do not see anything very promising or any breakthroughs," Mr. Peskov told reporters. "Very, very long work is ahead."</p> <p>Some Russian analysts and Western officials see the diplomacy as little more than a way to buy time while Russian troops regroup. Russia's promise to wind down military operations around Kyiv, which the</p>

	<p>Russian Defense Ministry cast as a good-faith gesture of de-escalation, in reality appeared to be a way to explain away a battlefield defeat.</p> <p>Russia forces around Kyiv were “regrouping,” the Defense Ministry said on Wednesday, although that assertion could not be independently confirmed. The aim of gathering forces near Kyiv was all along not to take the city, but to tie up and weaken Ukrainian troops in the area, the ministry claimed in a statement.</p> <p>“All these goals were achieved,” the ministry said, adding it would now focus on “the final stage of the operation to liberate” the Donbas area of eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>Mr. Putin himself has not commented on what the Kremlin calls a “special military operation” in Ukraine since March 18. Tatiana Stanovaya, founder of the France-based political analysis firm R. Politik, noted that much of what Ukraine proposed on Tuesday would be a nonstarter for Mr. Putin, such as the idea that there would be a 15-year negotiating process about the status of Crimea — something that Mr. Putin, who annexed the Ukrainian peninsula in 2014, says is nonnegotiable.</p> <p>She described the negotiations as, most likely, a feint rather than a signal that Russia was ready to wind down the war. But she noted that — as was the case in the run-up to the invasion — senior Russian officials were unlikely to know what Mr. Putin was really planning, leading to this week’s mixed messages.</p> <p>“The problem with the Russian regime is that, once again, no one understands what Putin wants,” Ms. Stanovaya said. “As a result, we get this informational chaos.”</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>03/30 Vaccine diminished protection adolescents</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/health/covid-vaccines-children.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/health/covid-vaccines-children.html</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>In yet another twist to the debate over how best to protect children against the coronavirus, researchers reported on Wednesday that Covid vaccines conferred diminished protection against hospitalization among children 12 and older during the latest Omicron surge.</p> <p>Vaccine effectiveness against hospitalization held steady in children aged 5 to 11 years, however, and among adolescents ages 12 to 18 years, two doses of the vaccine remained highly protective against critical illness requiring life support.</p> <p>But effectiveness against hospitalization for less severe illness dropped to just 20 percent among these children. The findings were published in the The New England Journal of Medicine.</p> <p>The data are broadly consistent with studies showing that, across all age groups, the vaccines lost much of their power against infection with the Omicron variant but still prevented severe illness and death.</p> <p>While any hospitalization is unnerving, it is reassuring that the vaccines still protected children from the worst outcomes of infection, said Dr. Manish Patel, a researcher at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention who led the study.</p> <p>Among adolescents in the study who were critically ill, 93 percent were unvaccinated, and most had at least one underlying condition, Dr. Patel noted. “I think the big take-home message is that with the simple act of vaccination, you can prevent most critical illness in most children,” he said.</p> <p>As of March 23, only about one in four children ages 5 to 11, and just over half of adolescents 12 to 17, were fully vaccinated in the United States. Those percentages have barely budged in the past few months.</p> <p>For some parents still debating vaccination, the decision is complicated by the seeming retreat of the coronavirus. Cases and deaths have fallen to their lowest levels in a year, and no one yet knows whether the BA.2 subvariant of Omicron will bring another wave.</p>

Some parents, believing their children's risk of Covid to be trivial, have been reluctant to vaccinate them from the start. But while children remain much less likely than adults to become seriously ill, many more of them were hospitalized during the Omicron surge than at any other time in the pandemic.

In the new study, the researchers analyzed medical records and interviewed parents of children ages 5 and older who were hospitalized for Covid. They excluded children who tested positive for the coronavirus but had been admitted to the hospital for other reasons.

Because relatively few children are hospitalized for Covid, the researchers were able to identify only 1,185 children, comparing them with 1,627 others who did not have Covid. Among those hospitalized for Covid, 291 received life support and 14 died.

The study included data from 31 hospitals in 23 states, and spanned July 1 to Dec. 18, 2021, when the Delta variant was circulating, and Dec. 19 to Feb. 17, when the Omicron variant was dominant. During the Delta period, effectiveness against hospitalization was more than 90 percent among the adolescents up to 44 weeks after immunization.

During the Omicron surge, however, those numbers dropped sharply to about 40 percent for protection against hospitalization overall, regardless of the time since vaccination.

When the researchers parsed the data by severity of illness, they found that vaccine effectiveness against critical illness among hospitalized adolescents remained high, at 79 percent, but had fallen to 20 percent for less severe illness.

The new study is among the first to look at vaccine effectiveness in relation to severity of illness among hospitalized patients. It's possible that this trend would appear among adult patients, too, if they were analyzed similarly, said Eli Rosenberg, deputy director for science at the New York State Department of Health.

"This split along critical, noncritical is interesting," he said. "This definitely adds a new layer."

In children ages 5 to 11 years, full vaccination had an effectiveness of 68 percent against hospitalization overall. Those data were gathered during the Omicron surge, because these children became eligible for vaccination only on Nov. 2. There were too few to analyze effectiveness by severity of illness.

About 78 percent of all hospitalized adolescents in the study, and 82 percent of younger children, had one or more underlying medical conditions, like obesity, autoimmune diseases or respiratory problems, including asthma.

The study suggests that the vaccine protected a majority of these children from the worst outcomes, said Dr. Luciana Borio, a former acting chief scientist at the Food and Drug Administration.

"It really validates the importance of vaccines for children 5 and older, and especially for those that are immunocompromised or have underlying medical conditions," she said.

The Omicron variant can partly dodge immune defenses, so it is not surprising that the vaccines did not do as well as against the Delta variant, she and others said. Another recent study showed that in adolescents ages 12 to 17, two doses of the vaccine also offered virtually no defense against moderate illness caused by the Omicron variant. (Booster doses are now recommended for all Americans ages 12 and older.)

The large discrepancy in vaccine effectiveness between those who needed life support and those who did not may be due in part to the wide range of symptoms for which children were hospitalized. About one in four adolescents in the study required life-supporting interventions like mechanical ventilation or extracorporeal membrane oxygenation.



Dr. Marietta Vazquez, an infectious diseases specialist at Yale School of Medicine who was not involved in the study, said that, in her experience, most children who were hospitalized during the Omicron surge recovered quickly.

“The children who we saw admitted — they were either very, very sick, or they were mostly admitted because they were infected and they had high fevers or they had low oxygen saturation,” she said.

Parents also seemed more inclined to bring young children to the hospital during the Omicron surge, Dr. Vazquez added: “There’s such concern and fear about Covid.”

Some researchers have theorized that the decline in vaccine protection among adolescents resulted from waning effectiveness over time — that is, adolescents may not have been as well protected during the Omicron surge because too much time had elapsed since their immunizations.

But the new study found that vaccine effectiveness against the Omicron variant was 43 percent up to 22 weeks after immunization, and 38 percent between 23 and 44 weeks. Waning immunity appeared to be less a factor than the variant itself.

“It looked like it was more Omicron-related,” Dr. Patel said.

Most of the vaccinated adolescents in the new study had received just two doses. There were not enough of those who had received a third dose to evaluate its benefit, but a previous study suggested that a booster shot drastically improved protection against moderate illness in this age group, as it does in adults.

“I really think children should get three doses, and that I hope will raise these numbers,” said Akiko Iwasaki, an immunologist at Yale University. So far, only about 14 percent of children 12 and older have received a booster dose.

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HEADLINE	03/30 FEC fines Clinton campaign, DNC
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/30/fec-fines-clinton-campaign-dnc-spending-steele-dos/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/30/fec-fines-clinton-campaign-dnc-spending-steele-dos/</a>
GIST	<p>The Federal Election Commission has fined Hillary Clinton’s 2016 campaign and the Democratic National Committee for failing to disclose campaign spending that ended up in the pocket of Christopher Steele, the former British spy who authored a Russian-based dossier to damage Donald Trump.</p> <p>The FEC fined Mrs. Clinton’s campaign \$8,000 and levied a heftier punishment on the DNC, which must pay a \$105,000 penalty.</p> <p>The agency said the two entities “misreported the purpose of certain disbursements.”</p> <p>The commission issued the fines after receiving a complaint from the Coolidge Reagan Foundation, which describes itself as a First Amendment watchdog group.</p> <p>Neither the DNC nor Mrs. Clinton immediately commented about the FEC ruling.</p> <p>Mr. Trump proclaimed the FEC fines provided further proof that the Clinton campaign and other Democrats were out to damage him politically through the now-discredited Steele dossier.</p> <p>“This was done to create, as I have stated many times, and is now confirmed, a hoax funded by the DNC and the Clinton Campaign,” Mr. Trump said in a statement. “This corruption is only beginning to be revealed, is un-American, and must never be allowed to happen again. Where do I go to get my reputation back?”</p> <p>The FEC announced its decision a week after Mr. Trump filed a sweeping lawsuit against Mrs. Clinton, the DNC and others. The lawsuit said they “maliciously conspired to weave a false narrative” that Mr.</p>

Trump was colluding with Russia to win the 2016 election. It cites the Steele dossier and lays out how Mrs. Clinton and other Democrats conspired to assemble it as a show of proof of collusion.

“This duplicitous arrangement existed for a singular self-serving purpose — to discredit Donald J. Trump and his campaign,” the lawsuit said.

A spokeswoman for Mr. Trump has not responded to a request for a comment about the FEC fines.

The group that filed the FEC complaint accused the Clinton campaign and the DNC of conspiring with foreigners in violation of federal campaign finance law to undermine Mr. Trump, who was then the Republican presidential nominee.

According to the complaint, the Clinton campaign and the DNC used the law firm Perkins Coie to “scheme” with Mr. Steele, a British national, to write and disseminate the salacious and unverified Steele dossier, which was produced using information from current and former Russian government officials.

The dossier sought to tarnish Mr. Trump with such infamous stories as the existence of a “pee tape” that showed Mr. Trump urinating on a mattress in a Moscow hotel room with prostitutes. None of the content of the dossier was ever proved, but it dominated media coverage of Mr. Trump well into his presidency.

In 2017, it was disclosed that the Clinton campaign and DNC attorney Marc Elias paid the Washington research firm Fusion GPS to dig up dirt on Mr. Trump and Fusion GPS hired Mr. Steele.

“In the process, the Clinton machine failed to publicly report the use of Perkins Coie as a ‘straw man intermediary,’ despite funneling more than \$1 million through the firm — a blatant violation of federal campaign finance laws,” Coolidge Reagan Foundation officials said in a statement. “The fact that Hillary for America and the DNC procured something ‘of value’ from a foreign national — provided by the Kremlin — while failing to publicly acknowledge their relationship with Perkins Coie, amounts to false reporting in unprecedented fashion,” said the statement.

The Steele dossier also played a key role in instigating the FBI to investigate Mr. Trump on accusations that he colluded with Russia to win the 2016 election. The bureau relied on it for a yearlong wiretap of a Trump associate. Then-FBI Director James B. Comey reported the dossier contents to Mr. Trump early in his presidency.

Details of that meeting between Mr. Comey and the president were leaked to reporters and justified news media’s decision to begin reporting on the Steele dossier’s wild and unproven claims.

Democratic lawmakers also endorsed the Steele dossier. They included Rep. Adam B. Schiff of California, who was the ranking member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence at the time.

Mr. Schiff has not retracted his comments, even though the dossier contents were never proved, nor was there any direct evidence that Mr. Trump colluded with Russia.

Nonetheless, Mr. Schiff said the dossier’s claim that Russia helped Mr. Trump’s campaign “turned out to be all too true.”

The dossier’s contents were debunked in special counsel Robert Mueller’s 448-page investigative report issued in 2019.

The Steele dossier included at least a dozen accusations of collusion between Mr. Trump and his associates, and Russia. The Clinton campaign provided the dossier to news outlets and the Justice Department.

	Mr. Mueller’s investigation of Trump-Russia collusion, which lasted nearly two years and cost taxpayers \$32 million, could not confirm a single claim from the Steele dossier.
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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 ICE preps for record illegal migrant surge</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/29/ice-officers-prepare-massive-crash-immigration-sys/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/29/ice-officers-prepare-massive-crash-immigration-sys/</a>
GIST	<p>U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement employees have been warned to prepare for the end of the border pandemic emergency policy as soon as this week — with predictions that illegal border crossings, already at record levels, could triple.</p> <p>Agency employees, who usually handle enforcement in the interior of the country, have been warned they may need to be deployed to the border so they can help the Border Patrol with an anticipated migrant surge, according to an ICE officer who received the alert.</p> <p>“We are on a massive crash trajectory for the system,” the officer told The Washington Times.</p> <p>Homeland Security Department officials confirmed Tuesday that they are preparing for migrant flows as high as 18,000 people per day, or more than half a million per month. Such levels — about the size of the city of Atlanta — are unheard of in American history.</p> <p>Department officials said the 18,000-a-day scenario is the “very high” contingency. They also have plans for a “high” 12,000-a-day rate, and for the current, already elevated rate, which Border Patrol agents say is about 6,000 to 7,000.</p> <p>Officials, briefing reporters on the condition of anonymity, said they are working to build manpower, processing, transportation and medical capacity to be ready for a surge.</p> <p>“These strategies are designed to enable a safe, orderly and humane process at the border that prioritizes life safety, national security and process efficiency,” one official said.</p> <p>The preparations seem to presage the end of what is known as Title 42, a health emergency order that has been in place for more than two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The order gives the Homeland Security Department the power to expel border jumpers immediately.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which rules on when to trigger Title 42, faces a Thursday deadline for deciding whether to extend the pandemic emergency.</p> <p>The CDC faces intense pressure from President Biden’s political base demanding an end to Title 42, one of the few Trump-era get-tough border policies the new administration has maintained.</p> <p>The Congressional Hispanic Caucus said in a statement Tuesday that the border shutdown has “always been suspect.” With the waning of deadly COVID-19 cases, the caucus said, it’s past time to end the policy altogether.</p> <p>“This policy must go,” said Rep. Nanette Barragan, California Democrat and first vice chair of the caucus.</p> <p>She and other immigrant rights activists say people with legitimate asylum claims are being tossed out of the country before they have a chance to make their cases, condemning them to violence in Mexico, if they wait there, or their homes if they return to their countries of origin.</p> <p>There are some key dissenters among Democrats, however.</p>

Sens. Kyrsten Sinema and Mark Kelly, Arizona Democrats, fired off a letter last week urging a go-slow approach and complained of “the lack of a specific plan” for handling the expected surge.

They said a “comprehensive” plan needs to be in place before any big changes.

Sen. Joe Manchin III, West Virginia Democrat, also called for Title 42 to be maintained. He pointed to rising COVID-19 cases worldwide.

He said the CDC has already allowed carve-outs for some vulnerable populations such as juveniles traveling without parents, but he cautioned against a wholesale repeal right now.

“With encounters along our southern border surging and the highly-transmissible Omicron BA.2 subvariant emerging as the dominate strain in the United States, now is not the time to throw caution to the wind,” the senator said in a letter to the CDC.

Border security experts say Title 42 is the only thing standing between a border in crisis and a border in “utter meltdown,” as Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Kentucky Republican, put it last week.

Over the past five months, Customs and Border Protection has encountered 967,743 unauthorized migrants, which is a record pace. Of those, 443,177 — 45% — have been immediately turned back under Title 42. Should the policy disappear, the government will have to figure out how what to do with them.

Some will be placed in speedy deportation proceedings, but many will lodge asylum claims, earning a foothold in the U.S. while their cases wind their way through immigration courts.

Homeland Security last week finalized plans for a system that would turn over the asylum decisions to immigration officers rather than immigration courts. That plan will have to be phased in over the coming years, and officials privately acknowledge the administration is not ready to handle the expected surge.

That leaves few good options and likely means even more illegal immigrants will be caught and released at the border.

One ICE officer who spoke to The Times on the condition of anonymity said that’s where ICE comes in.

With the Border Patrol issuing immigration court summonses in only a fraction of cases, it’s left to ICE, the interior enforcement agency, to fill in the gaps.

As of the end of February, ICE had 18,511 migrants in detention. That is the equivalent of just one day’s worth of border jumpers under Homeland Security’s worst-case scenario.

ICE referred questions about its border support operations to Homeland Security headquarters, which didn’t respond to an inquiry from The Times.

But the department did schedule a telephone briefing with reporters where senior officials — speaking on the condition that they not be named — confirmed they were trying to prepare for a surge.

One official said they were already facing strains because of changes in the demographics of the unauthorized flow across the border. People come from far beyond Mexico and its southern neighbors of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador — the traditional sending countries.

Instead, it’s Cubans, Ecuadorians and Venezuelans who are “really driving some of the increases we’re seeing at the border,” the official said.

The U.S. has strained relations with those countries, making it tougher to negotiate expulsions and deportations, and the migrants are coming across remote parts of the U.S.-Mexico border, where Homeland Security lacks the infrastructure to handle them.

	<p>The official insisted he doesn't know what the CDC would do — “we literally have no idea of what's going to happen,” he told reporters — but said they will be prepared.</p> <p>The preparations include building detention tents at the border, arranging for more medical personnel to screen arrivals, and securing more flight capacity to ship people deeper into the country.</p> <p>The Homeland Security officials also said they are reaching out to state and local leaders and nongovernmental organizations to try to get help in preparing for a surge.</p> <p>“Engagement is an important part of our strategy,” one of the officials said.</p> <p>If that outreach is happening it hasn't reached border sheriffs, said Mark J. Dannels, sheriff in Cochise County, Arizona, and chair of the National Sheriffs Association's border security committee.</p> <p>“This is consistent with their failure to share a collective message with local and state law enforcement to include sharing an action plan with us,” he told The Times. “Complete intellectual avoidance by this administration.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 US sanctions target Iran ballistic missiles</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/30/us-sanctions-target-irans-ballistic-missiles-biden/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/30/us-sanctions-target-irans-ballistic-missiles-biden/</a>
GIST	<p>The Biden administration on Wednesday slapped sanctions on an Iranian businessman and his network of companies believed to be a critical supplier for Iran's ballistic missile program.</p> <p>The sanctions up pressure on Tehran as President Biden's attempts to revive stalled talks to revive an Obama-era nuclear deal with the rogue regime.</p> <p>The Treasury Department said the measure is in response to recent missile attacks in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates and reflects the U.S. commitment to “preventing the Iranian regime's development and use of advanced ballistic missiles.”</p> <p>Brian E. Nelson, the Treasury undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, said the administration still wants to get Iran back in compliance with the nuke deal, which is known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA. But he said the missile program needed to be curbed.</p> <p>“We will not hesitate to target those who support Iran's ballistic missile program,” he said. “We will also work with other partners in the region to hold Iran accountable for its actions, including gross violations of the sovereignty of its neighbors.”</p> <p>The new sanctions specifically target Mohammad Ali Hosseini and his network of companies. Treasury said the companies were used to funnel propellant materials to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Research and Self Sufficiency Jihad Organization and Iran's Parchin Chemical Industries for use in the ballistic missile program.</p> <p>The administration is also eyeing a return to nuclear talks with Iran that stalled after Russia, an intermediary in the negotiations, invaded Ukraine.</p> <p>President Trump withdrew from the nuclear agreement in 2018 and reimposed the sanctions that had previously been lifted as part of the Obama-era accord.</p> <p>Mr. Biden has committed to returning to the deal, and U.S. officials have warned that the administration has just weeks to reach an agreement given Iran's nuclear development progress.</p>

	<p>Tehran has demanded that the administration remove sanctions as stipulated in the original deal in exchange for curbing its nuclear program.</p> <p>Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have eyed the administration's attempts to reenter the deal with skepticism, and have criticized the administration for keeping details of the negotiations close to the vest.</p> <p>Republicans argued that a return to the deal would not stop Iran's advance toward a nuclear weapon, and say Iran's violations of previous agreements should bar any further negotiations.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Republicans on the House Oversight Committee reemphasized their concerns about reviving talks with Iran.</p> <p>In a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the lawmakers said the "ongoing negotiations with Iran raise serious concerns about why the Administration is willing to engage and provide U.S. taxpayer dollars to a country adverse to America's interest."</p> <p>"Iran is a state sponsor of terror, and once in the possession of a nuclear capability, could weaponize it against our nation and our allies," wrote the lawmakers, who were led by the committee's top Republican, Rep. James Comer of Kentucky. "The U.S. should not engage in negotiations with such a barbaric regime."</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>03/30 Inflation hard choice fixed-income seniors</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/30/inflation-forces-hard-choices-fixed-income-seniors/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/30/inflation-forces-hard-choices-fixed-income-seniors/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Groceries or rent? Medicine or utilities? Record-setting inflation will increasingly force such choices on seniors on fixed income, financial experts say.</p> <p>The Consumer Price Index, which rose 7.9% in February over the previous 12 months, is outpacing Social Security's annual cost-of-living adjustment for inflation, retirement planners and economists warned Wednesday.</p> <p>What's more, inflation is eroding the relative value of seniors' investments and savings, reducing their purchasing power and lowering the material quality of their lives.</p> <p>"Older Americans are getting hammered right now," said economist Victor Claar, a professor at Florida Gulf Coast University. "And for many the crisis is already here."</p> <p>Social Security recipients got a record 5.9% annual bump in January and may get another bump of 7.9% next year, but food prices were up 1% overall and food-at-home prices up 1.5%. Rent and clothing costs also increased in February.</p> <p>"Further eroding the impact of the Social Security adjustment this year was the largest increase for Medicare Part B premiums in the program's history," said retirement planner Chris Orestis, president of Retirement Genius.</p> <p>John A. Moore, chairman of accounting, finance and economics at Walsh College, said seniors face the additional problem of spending more of their income on consumer goods than other age groups.</p> <p>He pointed to a 2016 article by the Bureau of Labor Statistics showing that 65- to 74-year-olds spent 75% of their income on housing, food, transportation and health costs before COVID-19.</p> <p>"Inflation is a hidden tax on the poor and senior citizens," Mr. Moore said. "Their best hope is for policymakers to make the hard decisions needed to harness inflation, just as Paul Volcker did in the late 1970s and early 1980s."</p>

Financial adviser Chris Murray, founder of Murray Financial Group, said seniors should be mindful of the overall cost of goods.

“People are having to make decisions on buying groceries versus putting gas in their cars with gasoline prices at record highs,” he said. “For people who are retired and on fixed incomes, they are either eating more of their savings or sacrificing in other areas.”

Marc Scudillo, managing officer of EisnerAmper Wealth Management and Corporate Benefits, said the changes could surprise some seniors.

“For a long time now, retirees had become accustomed to little to no changes in their income needs year over year,” Mr. Scudillo said. “Those income needs would remain consistent for three to five years, and then a slight increase would be required for inflationary adjustments to income so clients could maintain their lifestyle.”

Economist Judson C. Edwards, dean of the Sorrell College of Business at Troy University, said seniors also should consider sales taxes when deciding where to retire.

“One of the emerging areas of concern for fixed, low-income retirees, which accompanies that of rising consumer goods prices, is the growing impact of state and local sales taxes,” he said. “Though many Southern states are often cited as top tax-friendly environments, these same states have some of the highest sales taxes in the United States.”

For example, he said groceries are taxed on an average of 9.5% across Alabama, where he lives.

“That may not seem like much, but the longer inflation continues, it will steadily eat away at their monthly budget,” Mr. Edwards said.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 Ukraine braces wave of attacks in east</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/31/ukraine-braces-for-fresh-wave-of-attacks-as-russia-builds-forces-in-donbas">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/31/ukraine-braces-for-fresh-wave-of-attacks-as-russia-builds-forces-in-donbas</a>
GIST	<p>Russia is building up its forces in eastern Ukraine in readiness for a new wave of attacks in the breakaway Donbas region, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has claimed, despite the planned resumption of peace talks on Friday.</p> <p>In an early morning video address on Thursday, Zelenskiy said that Russia’s announcement that it was pulling troops away from cities such as Kyiv and Chernihiv had been forced upon the Kremlin by the fierce resistance of Ukraine’s armed forces.</p> <p>The Ukrainian leader added that his government was instead seeing “a build-up of Russian forces for new strikes on the Donbas and we are preparing for that”. The leader of the Donetsk People’s Republic, Denis Pushilin, said on Wednesday that offensive operations were intensifying.</p> <p>Such a move would be consistent with Moscow’s claim this week about a withdrawal from some areas to focus on “liberating” the breakaway eastern Donbas region, although Zelenskiy said it was “the consequence of our defenders’ work”.</p> <p>The Donbas includes the besieged city of Mariupol where the Russian defence ministry announced a local ceasefire on Thursday to allow civilians to be evacuated, according to Agence France-Presse.</p> <p>Despite the withdrawal claims, Russian forces have continued to bombard the northern city of Chernihiv and parts of the capital Kyiv. Ukrainian military officials said they had seen some Russian units pull out but only because they had suffered heavy losses.</p>



The fate of the south-eastern Donbas region, which Russia demands Ukraine cede to the separatists, was a topic of discussion at peace talks held on Tuesday in Istanbul palace. A senior Ukrainian negotiator said on Wednesday night that the talks will resume online on Friday.

Zelenskiy said the talks had produced nothing “concrete” while one of his senior aides said the Ukrainian leader could meet Putin “soon”.

The head of Ukraine’s negotiating team, Mykhailo Podolyak, said that Moscow was scrutinising proposals submitted by Kyiv in Istanbul which he believed could lead to a presidential peace summit between the pair. However, a Kremlin spokesman downplayed the hopes of an early breakthrough in the peace talks.

Ukraine has sought a ceasefire without compromising on territory or sovereignty, though it has proposed adopting a neutral status in exchange for security guarantees. Russia opposes Ukraine joining Nato, the western military alliance, and has cited its potential membership as a reason for the invasion.

Zelenskiy also said in his TV address that he talked to Joe Biden for an hour on Wednesday during another “very active diplomatic day”. He said he thanked the US president for a new \$1bn humanitarian aid package and an additional \$500m in direct budget support. Zelenskiy said: “The support of the United States is vital for us. And now it is especially important to lend a hand to Ukraine, to show all the power of the democratic world.”

A possible shift in the military situation in Ukraine came as the head of Britain’s spy services agency claimed that Putin has been misinformed about the extent of Russian military failure in Ukraine because his advisers are too frightened to tell him the damning truth.

Sir Jeremy Fleming, in a speech given in Australia on Thursday, said the Russian leader had misjudged the strength of Ukrainian resistance, the western response and the ability of his forces to deliver a rapid victory.

Fleming, whose comments were backed up by US and EU officials, said that the failure to achieve a quick victory must be causing discord in the Kremlin. “And even though we believe Putin’s advisers are afraid to tell him the truth, what’s going on and the extent of these misjudgments must be crystal clear to the regime.”

Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby agreed and said: “It’s [Putin’s] military. It’s his war. He chose it ... the fact that he may not fully understand the degree to which his forces are failing in Ukraine, that’s a little discomfoting.”

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Putin promotes Chechen leader</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/30/putin-promotes-chechen-leader-with-ties-to-of-kremlin-critic">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/30/putin-promotes-chechen-leader-with-ties-to-of-kremlin-critic</a>
GIST	<p>The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, has promoted Ramzan Kadyrov to lieutenant-general for his role in the invasion of Ukraine, which the Chechen leader is using to showcase his loyalty to Moscow and his own impunity.</p> <p>This week Kadyrov claimed that a key ally linked to the 2015 murder of the Russian opposition leader, Boris Nemtsov, was injured fighting in the besieged port city of Mariupol.</p> <p>Ruslan Geremeev was pictured in hospital, where Kadyrov visited him. Earlier videos the Chechen leader posted calling Geremeev a “dear brother” claimed to show him on the frontlines in Mariupol, including at the city hall.</p>

Nemtsov's family have long insisted that Geremeev was a mastermind of the murder plot. Five Chechen men were found guilty of the killing in 2017, but the trial was denounced by relatives and allies as a cover-up that failed to bring those behind the assassination to justice.

Investigators told the 2017 trial that they visited Geremeev's property in Chechnya but "no one opened the door". They also named Geremeev's driver, Ruslan Mukhudinov, as an organiser of the killing and said he offered the suspects millions of roubles for the murder.

Mukhudinov has since fled and investigators said after the verdict that the case against him was ongoing. Geremeev, who is a relative of two Russian MPs, served in the same paramilitary security unit as Zaur Dadaev, a former senior officer convicted of shooting Nemtsov.

The unit has close ties to Kadyrov, though he has never been directly linked to the murder. Geremeev's appearance on the frontlines in Mariupol is a show of both Kadyrov's strength and his allies' apparent ability to defy Russian law.

However, the multiple videos shared by Kadyrov are not filmed on the frontline, suggesting the Chechens may have a role with as much responsibility for propaganda as for fighting.

The presence of Kadyrov's men, who have a reputation for extreme brutality, is most likely aimed as much at spreading fear as bolstering numbers in battle.

They may also take on other tasks, with some reportedly assigned to patrol behind frontline forces and shoot deserters. Others have been assigned to interrogations of civilians in the city – a grim speciality of Kadyrov's followers, who have a track record of torture and abuse.

A senior commander from one of the eastern Russian-backed breakaway regions, Alexander Khodakovsky, said in a video interview that the Chechens had not been expected to fight on the frontlines.

Instead they were originally brought in for "clearing" operations in territory Russia seized around Mariupol. He later apologised to Kadyrov for the remarks undermining his fighter's military prowess.

For Kadyrov himself, regardless of the role taken on by his troops, the war has offered a chance to showcase his commitment to Putin, the man on whom his own bloodstained authority relies, by sending troops.

To this end he has attempted to mobilise Chechen society behind the war effort, including recruiting at martial arts clubs and recently opening the gates of its prisons to army recruiters, with a group expected to travel to fight in Ukraine with the next rotation, security services said.

But he has also used it to try to boost his own profile as a ruthless fighter, with his men emphasising their loyalty to him rather than to the Russian state. He has a troubled relationship with branches of the Russian security services.

This week he denounced peace talks even as Russia promised to reduce military activity around the capital, Kyiv. "We need to finish what we started," Kadyrov said in a statement.

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HEADLINE	03/31 Hong Kong, China divided over Covid aid
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/31/world/asia/hong-kong-china-covid.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=World%20News">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/31/world/asia/hong-kong-china-covid.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=World%20News</a>
GIST	HONG KONG — Soon after Omicron overwhelmed Hong Kong's health care system in a deadly outbreak, Beijing rushed to help. Contractors from mainland China built vast isolation facilities. The central government sent more than 1,000 medical workers to staff treatment and testing centers, as well as butchers to help stabilize the local meat supply.

To the city's Beijing-backed establishment, the aid from the central government was a godsend. Carrie Lam, the local leader, traveled to the border with the mainland to greet the arriving medics with a bow, a sign of deep gratitude rarely used in the city.

But to many people in both Hong Kong and mainland China, the outbreak has only exposed the political and cultural divide between the city, a former British colony that returned to Chinese control in 1997, and the rest of the country.

Some residents in Hong Kong have criticized the stringent Covid measures pushed by Beijing such as the centralized isolation of patients and widespread lockdowns of buildings, saying they undermined the city's longstanding protections for individual liberties.

People in the mainland, though, depicted such attitudes as selfish and lacking the sense of national duty that is necessary to contain the virus.

University of Hong Kong researchers believe more than half of the city's 7.5 million people have been infected. The extent of the outbreak has forced the government to back down on some of its stricter plans, such as imposing a lockdown to conduct mass testing. Many in the mainland were shocked when Hong Kong said it planned to loosen its Covid control measures even before it had curbed the outbreak.

"Let Hong Kong go ahead with the experiment. Just take back our medics and make sure our border is sealed," Zhen Haoyuan, a prominent mainland Chinese commenter, wrote on Weibo, a popular Chinese social media platform.

The public backlash on both sides follows sweeping efforts by Beijing to bring Hong Kong more directly under the control of China's central government. Beijing imposed a national security law in 2020 that stamped out widespread dissent and overhauled local election laws that decimated the pro-democracy opposition camp.

Beijing has depicted its contributions to Hong Kong's epidemic response in political terms. Before the medical workers departed for Hong Kong, the ruling Communist Party's flag was prominently displayed and the national anthem sung at ceremonies. Red banners that say "The central government supports Hong Kong, fight the pandemic with one heart" are prominently displayed on newly built quarantine facilities.

Many Hong Kong residents are unimpressed. On Facebook, a platform popular in Hong Kong but banned in the mainland, they have criticized the quarantine facilities as substandard, seizing on issues like the installation of squat toilets, which aren't widely used in Hong Kong.

Cathy Fung, a 33-year-old former nurse who was sent to an isolation facility with her husband and her mother in early March when they tested positive, said the confinement was an unnecessary inconvenience.

"It really disturbed the daily lives of people," she said. "What's the difference between this and isolating ourselves at home?"

Ms. Fung wondered if the money spent on isolation facilities could have been better used, for example, by helping the unemployed. "Does Hong Kong really need this? Why couldn't the Hong Kong government just say no?" she asked.

Mrs. Lam, the city's leader, and other officials have said that deviating from the central government's goal of eliminating local outbreaks is not an option. The city has sought — and so far failed — to bring infections down in order for the mainland to reopen its borders to Hong Kong.

Leung Pak-yin, the former chief executive of Hong Kong's Hospital Authority, criticized the Hong Kong government in a Facebook post for blindly following mainland practices, relying on "the golden shield of political correctness" rather than science to guide its epidemic response.

Some Hong Kong medical workers have welcomed the help from the mainland.

Vincent Chong Wai-lam, a 41-year-old support team supervisor at a local public hospital, said he and his colleagues had been pushed to the limit by the outbreak. Because of the shortage of people and space, hospitals had been forced to leave bodies in wards near where other patients were being treated.

“In one night, I moved more than 80 bodies with another colleague. The whole hospital needs support from the mainland,” Mr. Chong said. He acknowledged, however, that his view wasn’t widely shared by his colleagues.

Local doctors have long resisted efforts to allow mainland medical staff to practice in Hong Kong, saying they lacked an understanding of local conditions and fluency in English, which is widely used in the city. The government used emergency powers last month to allow doctors and nurses from the mainland to practice in the city, which has a separate licensing system.

The public debate about the qualifications of mainland medics took an ominous turn when a reporter with a Hong Kong news outlet asked officials at a briefing how members of the public could file complaints against mainland doctors in the event of a mishap.

State-owned media outlets denounced the reporter. Pro-Beijing activists started an online petition accusing the reporter of spreading hate speech against mainland medics and possibly violating the national security law. Under mounting pressure, the reporter’s employer, Now News, apologized.

Mavis Fung, a 48-year-old company clerk, said she thought the reporter had been disrespectful. “She was suggesting that the mainland doctors would definitely make mistakes,” said Ms. Fung, who is not related to Cathy Fung. She said that she and other supporters of the central government had paid for commercial billboards in the city center expressing support for the medics.

The deployment of mainland medical workers underscored deep-seated cultural divides and a sense among many mainlanders that they face discrimination in Hong Kong. One post that was widely shared on Weibo noted that mainland nurses sent to Hong Kong were being asked to feed patients and change their diapers. Mainland observers considered that demeaning, because such tasks are usually handled by less trained workers.

But in Hong Kong, such work is part of a nurse’s routine, said Cathy Fung, who was previously a nurse in Hong Kong and whose sister works as a nurse in the mainland. She said she believed much of the dispute stemmed from a lack of understanding of the differences between medical work in Hong Kong and the mainland.

“If you don’t understand the policies here, how can you judge with only one side of your eye,” she said.

Tian Feilong, a professor at Beihang University in Beijing who studies Hong Kong, said the city’s resistance to mainland-style Covid controls was a result of an obsession with Western liberal values and an unease with the political overhaul. “There is discomfort with the systematic reform in recent years, and no recognition of China’s authority and political system,” he wrote in a recent column in Ming Pao, a Hong Kong newspaper.

The political crackdown that followed the 2019 protest movement has also exacerbated tensions, said Willy Lam, an adjunct professor of politics at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

“People just don’t want their life dictated by Beijing,” he said. “But tight control of the expression of Hong Kong people has made the situation even worse.”

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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/asia/myanmar-jungle-insurgency.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/asia/myanmar-jungle-insurgency.html</a>
GIST	<p>On jungle crests about a mile from the front lines in eastern Myanmar, a former hotel banquet coordinator slipped his index finger onto the trigger of an assault rifle. A dentist recalled picking larvae from a young fighter's infected bullet wound. A marketing manager described the adapted commercial drones she is directing to foil the enemy.</p> <p>More than a year after Myanmar's military seized full control in a coup — imprisoning the nation's elected leaders, killing more than 1,700 civilians and arresting at least 13,000 more — the country is at war, with some unlikely combatants in the fray.</p> <p>On one side is a military junta that, apart from a brief interlude of semi-democratic governance, has ruled with brutal force for half a century. On the other are tens of thousands of young city-dwellers who have taken up arms, trading college courses, video games and sparkly nail polish for life and death in the jungle.</p> <p>New York Times journalists recently visited a rainforest encampment in eastern Myanmar, where about 3,000 members of one newly minted militia are subsisting in crude bamboo or tarpaulin shelters and are engaging in battle nearly every day.</p> <p>While their numbers are a fraction of one of Southeast Asia's largest standing armies, these Generation Z warriors have thrown off balance a military that has long made war crimes its calling card. And the conflict is escalating, even as the world's attention has moved on to other moral outrages, like Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Today, far from consolidating its hold over the country, Myanmar's army, known as the Tatmadaw, is forced to fight on dozens of fronts, from the borderlands near India, China and Thailand to the villages and towns of the country's heartland. There are skirmishes nearly every day, and casualties, too.</p> <p>"I am fighting because I don't accept the military coup, and I don't accept that they want to take democracy from us," said a midwife from a city in southern Myanmar, who, like others, did not want her name used to protect her family members back home.</p> <p>Known by the nom de guerre Snow White, she made her way last May to an area controlled by an ethnic armed group that has been fighting for autonomy for decades. Since then, the ethnic rebels and deserters from the army have taught her how to load a rifle, assemble a handmade grenade and perform battlefield triage.</p> <p>"Our generation has ideals," she said. "We believe in freedom."</p> <p>Her 3-year-old son remains in the city. He does not know where his mother has gone, she said. Snow White stroked a puppy that made its way through the camp and on to several fighters' laps.</p> <p>"It's something to love," she said.</p> <p>Facing attacks from the civilian militias, which are fighting alongside ethnic insurgent groups, the Tatmadaw has ratcheted up a counteroffensive, launching airstrikes, burning villages and terrorizing those opposed to its power grab.</p> <p>"All the Tatmadaw knows how to do is to kill," said Ko Thant, who said he was a captain before he deserted from the army's 77th Light Infantry Division last year and has since trained hundreds of civilians in battlefield tactics. "We were brainwashed all the time, but some of us have woken up."</p> <p>The opposition to the military's coup in February 2021 began with an outpouring of millions of people into the streets of Myanmar's cities and towns. In sandals, high heels and in the case of Buddhist monks, barefoot, a country rallied peacefully for a return of its elected leadership. Within weeks, the</p>

Tatmadaw reverted to its old playbook. Army snipers targeted protesters with single, deadly shots to the head.

Some young people who had come of age during Myanmar's decade of reform saw little utility in the message of nonviolent dissent coming from veteran democracy activists. They wanted to fight back.

"Peaceful protests don't work if the enemy wants to kill us," said Naw Htee, a social worker turned militia sergeant. "We have to defend ourselves."

With tiny barrettes in her hair, she gestured at mortar fragments and artillery shells, the detritus of war that had rained on the jungle camp where she was living. A young man sat slumped next to her, a ragged scar on his shoulder from a firefight last month.

There are now hundreds of civilian militias across Myanmar, organized loosely into what are called the People's Defense Forces, or P.D.F. Each militia pledges allegiance to a civilian shadow government, the National Unity Government, which formed after the putsch, and some battalions are led by ousted lawmakers.

The National Unity Government says it has raised more than \$30 million for the war effort, mostly from donations from civilians. The surge of money has created curious imbalances. While veteran members of ethnic armed groups fight with old rifles bound in duct tape, some who belong to the People's Defense Forces show off new weaponry with expensive sights, though all still suffer from arms shortages.

For city kids with soft hands, enduring a malaria-plagued, snake-infested jungle is itself an achievement, much less avoiding the Tatmadaw's snipers, mortar shells and airstrikes.

"The P.D.F. in the jungle, they have sacrificed their lives for the country, and I have special respect for them," said U Yee Mon, a former poet who is now serving as the minister of defense for the National Unity Government.

Some of the young combatants were escaping arrest warrants issued for their participation in post-coup protests. They had little choice but to flee.

In a [human rights report](#) released on March 15, the United Nations accused the military junta of unleashing mass war crimes on its own people in the aftermath of the putsch.

But aside from some financial sanctions and words of condemnation, the global community has done little to punish Myanmar's junta. The National Unity Government has not won recognition from any country, even if its ranks are filled with elected politicians. With little hope of outside help, the shadow authority has partnered with the ethnic insurgent groups that control territory in Myanmar's border regions. Together, they have formed an underground railroad to bring young people to safety — and to train them in basic warfare.

One morning this month, a squad of resistance fighters, none older than 26, marched down to trenches on the front lines of eastern Myanmar, steering clear of handmade land mines they had planted to defend their territory because the army's positions were so close. Their breaths ran jagged. One fighter tripped on a branch and snapped a flip-flop. A couple of militia members wore body-armor vests, but without the hard ballistic plates that might save their lives.

"I don't like looking at blood," said Ko Kyaw, a 19-year-old university student, holding a bullet in his hand. "It makes me feel dizzy."

A few hours later, a pair of Tatmadaw attack helicopters strafed the rebel trenches, although advance intelligence had cleared the foxholes. At night, like nearly every night, Tatmadaw snipers took aim at

whatever caught their attention: the glow from a cellphone whose user was checking Facebook, perhaps, or the red ember of a cannabis joint.

The same day, to the north, a teacher and a medical student who had joined the resistance were killed, one shot in the head by a military sniper, the other felled by a mortar shell.

The National Unity Government claims that the People's Defense Forces, fighting alongside more experienced fighters from the ethnic militias, killed about 9,000 Tatmadaw soldiers from June 2021 through February 2022. (About 300 militia members have died in combat, according to the shadow government.) A Myanmar military spokesman said the actual death toll was lower, and the shadow authority's numbers could not be confirmed. But military sources acknowledged that the Tatmadaw was concerned about a rise in casualties.

The resistance's wounded are treated in an outdoor jungle clinic with bamboo operating tables and a dispensary fashioned out of strips of bamboo. Ko Mon Gyi, a militia member, rested on a wooden platform, his leg bandaged from a gunshot wound sustained in fighting last month. Eight other fighters had been injured that day.

"As soon as I'm healthy, I'll fight again," he said. "It's my duty."

Presiding over the clinic is a doctor who served in the Tatmadaw for nearly a dozen years. As a battlefield physician, Dr. Drid, as he calls himself, treated Tatmadaw soldiers injured in fighting against some of the same ethnic rebels who are now sheltering his People's Defense Forces battalion.

"I believe in human rights and democracy," Dr. Drid said. "The Tatmadaw should fight for these things, protect these things."

The former army doctor's voice shook and his hands trembled as he described the day last year when he left home and deserted. He did not tell his family where he went for fear that the Tatmadaw would retaliate against them; some relatives of soldiers who deserted have been imprisoned and tortured. For all his child knows, he said, he might have been killed in combat.

"They are cowards," he said, of the armed forces he had joined at the age of 15. "They are robots who cannot think."

For members of Myanmar's young generation, the coup was a return to an almost unimaginable past, one without Facebook and foreign investment. Under a former army regime, Myanmar had been one of the most isolated countries on earth. Since the putsch, the new junta, led by Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, has banned social media, destroyed the economy and again bunkered an entire nation.

"The generals stole our future," said Ko Arkar, who until the coup worked as a chef at a hotel in Yangon, the largest city in Myanmar.

He used to spend his days clarifying beef consommé and grilling the perfect medium-rare steak. Now he patrols the front lines with a network engineer, a garment factory worker and a medalist in sailing at the Southeast Asian Games.

Other generations of young people in Myanmar have tried to unseat the military from the jungle. It happened in 1962, after the army's first coup, and it happened in 1988, after the Tatmadaw crushed mass protests in Myanmar's version of the Tiananmen Square massacre. Nearly 35 years ago, students and intellectuals fled to the very same forests where the People's Defense Forces are now sheltering.

They, too, aligned with the ethnic rebels who have been battling for self-rule for decades. After a few years, that student-led armed movement fizzled. The ethnic groups that gave them refuge discovered that the students and their compatriots were not as dedicated to notions of ethnic equality as they had hoped. The military remained in power.



This time, the resistance is better organized and better funded. It has harnessed the energies of young people across the country, who are fighting in both urban and rural environments. And it is partnering more amicably with ethnic armed groups, such as those that represent the Karen minority, which has been fighting one of the world's longest running civil conflicts.

"We know how evil the Tatmadaw is because they have been killing our people and raping our women," said Saw Bu Paw, a battalion commander for the Karen National Liberation Army, one of dozens of ethnic rebel groups. "With the coup, everyone in the whole country knows their evil nature."

United Nations investigators have said that the Myanmar military's treatment of some of the country's ethnic minorities bears the hallmarks of genocide. This month, the United States designated the Tatmadaw's campaign against the Rohingya Muslim minority as a genocide, as well.

While no solid data exists, the number of Tatmadaw desertions appears, anecdotally, to be rising. Even before the coup, soldiers were overstretched and underpaid.

"Who wants to be a soldier now?" asked Dr. Wai, another Tatmadaw doctor who deserted and is now attending to the People's Defense Forces in the forest. "It is a shameful career."

War is ugly, and the rebels have been accused of abuses. In the cities, members of People's Defense Forces have carried out a campaign of assassinations and bombings that have raised questions of whether personal grudges are sometimes being carried out under the guise of fighting for democracy.

Still, the resistance keeps growing, luring unlikely recruits.

Until last year, John Henry Newman, as he is known by his baptismal name, was studying to become a priest at a Roman Catholic seminary in Yangon. His fingers, once practiced at caressing rosary beads, have pressed a rifle trigger again and again. In fighting last December in eastern Myanmar, the enemy was so close, he said — he fired, but he does not know if his bullets made contact.

"Killing is a sin," he said. "But not when it is a good war."

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Pakistan PM faces mounting pressure</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/asia/imran-khan-pakistan-vote.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/asia/imran-khan-pakistan-vote.html</a>
GIST	<p>ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — Days away from a no-confidence vote in Parliament, Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan is facing mounting pressure after a key ally in his political coalition joined the opposition on Wednesday, giving his opponents the votes required to remove him from office.</p> <p>The announcement from Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan or M.Q.M.-P, issued a critical blow to Mr. Khan, 69, who has been embroiled in a political crisis for weeks since the country's powerful military withdrew support for his government and a coalition of opposition parties moved to vote him out of power.</p> <p>Without the support of M.Q.M.-P., Mr. Khan has lost the simple majority needed to survive the parliamentary vote — prompting opponents to demand his resignation.</p> <p>"He has no other option, he has to resign," said Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, chairman of the opposition Pakistan Peoples Party.</p> <p>Ahead of the vote, which is expected on Sunday or Monday, Mr. Khan has scrambled this week to keep his party's coalition intact: He gathered thousands of supporters at a rally in Islamabad on Sunday, replaced the chief minister of Punjab — Pakistan's largest province — to secure one allied party's support</p>

on Monday and denounced his opponents as part of an American-influenced conspiracy to remove him from office.

On Wednesday, Mr. Khan met with the chief of Pakistan's Army and the director-general of Inter-Services Intelligence, according to Fawad Chaudhry, the information minister.

So far, there are few signs that the prime minister is willing to step down. On Wednesday, Mr. Khan's allies dismissed the calls for him to resign — a signal that the political turmoil embroiling Pakistan may only grow deeper in the coming days as he fights for his political survival.

"Prime Minister Imran Khan is a player who fights till the last ball," Mr. Chaudhry said on Twitter. "He will not resign."

The political crisis comes as Pakistan, with 220 million people, grapples with rising costs of living and double-digit inflation that has sent the prices of basic goods soaring and fueled criticism that Mr. Khan was failing to deliver on his touchstone promises of reviving the economy and creating an Islamist welfare state.

Seizing on a sense of growing dissatisfaction, a coalition of opposition parties announced earlier this month that it would bring a no-confidence motion against Mr. Khan. In recent weeks, dozens of allies have defected from Mr. Khan's own political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, or P.T.I., while the opposition has courted other parties in Mr. Khan's political coalition.

The announcement by M.Q.M.-P on Wednesday brought the expected number of votes against Mr. Khan in Parliament to 177 — enough for the opposition to win the simple majority needed in the 342-member National Assembly to oust him.

The party's support also meant that the opposition does not need to secure the votes of Mr. Khan's party defectors, which they had been courting in recent weeks. In a bid to stave off the threat of defections, Mr. Khan's government has gone to the Supreme Court seeking a lifetime disqualification of the party dissidents. The court is not expected to announce its decision until next week.

If Mr. Khan is voted out of office, lawmakers will choose an interim prime minister to serve until the next general election, scheduled for 2023.

While Wednesday's announcement offered a critical blow to Mr. Khan's coalition, some in his ranks have not entirely lost hope.

"Imran Khan will sail through," said Aliya Hamza Malik, a lawmaker, who recently met her party leader at his office. "He has told us to remain confident, and he is himself very confident and relaxed. He told us the ally political parties will stay by his side."

To muster public support, Mr. Khan held rallies across several cities in recent weeks, during which he accused his opponents of trying to buy the votes of his party members. He has also said there is a foreign conspiracy against his government, in retaliation for his independent foreign policy. Mr. Khan has been critical of Pakistan's past alliances with the United States and in recent years has tilted more toward China and Russia.

On Sunday, Mr. Khan's party members and supporters gathered at a huge rally in Islamabad. Speaking in front of a charged crowd, which his supporters claimed was one of the one of the biggest political gatherings in the country's capital in recent memory, Mr. Khan defended his government's record and economic policies, which have come under severe criticism from the opposition.

Pulling from his pocket a note that he said was evidence, Mr. Khan said a foreign conspiracy was underway in the country and local players were acting at the behest of foreign powers.

“Attempts are being made through foreign money to change the government in Pakistan,” he said. “We know from what places attempts are being made to pressure us. We have been threatened in writing but we will not compromise on national interest.”

He did not directly name any foreign country, but in recent weeks, he and his party members have been railing against America.

Mr. Khan’s officials have shared few details of the purported letter and declined to reveal its exact origin. Opposition politicians have termed the letter a political gimmick and said they doubt its veracity. They have urged Mr. Khan to present it before Parliament.

Security officials have also dismissed the letter, saying it is an internal diplomatic communication and it has been blown out of proportion.

Mr. Khan’s political fortunes dwindled in recent months after the country’s powerful military withdrew support for his government following differences over key military appointments.

He has been critical of the military’s newfound position of “neutrality” in domestic political affairs, and during one political rally said “only an animal is neutral,” stressing that people have to take sides when it is a matter of good and evil.

Senior security officials say Mr. Khan’s government should not put the neutrality of the armed forces to test. Unlike in the past, when the military was accused of meddling in politics, this time around the military has taken a back seat.

“The army has nothing to do with politics,” Maj. Gen. Babar Iftikhar, the army spokesman, said at a news conference this month.

As tension between Mr. Khan and the opposition grows, many Pakistanis are concerned that the latest round of political upheaval and turmoil will have lasting consequences for the country, no matter the outcome of the coming no-confidence vote.

Though opposition parties have coalesced recently around a singular agenda of toppling Mr. Khan, they have historically been pitted against one another — an equilibrium that could return after the vote, analysts say.

“The country has gone into deep political crisis due to the no-confidence move by the opposition,” Enver Baig, a former senator, said. “It has created a lot of uncertainty, and political instability is expected to continue for a long time.”

“But if Khan is ousted, there will be a dogfight between different parties of the opposition coalition,” which, he added, “cannot be in the same boat for a long time.”

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Victimhood? Serbia sticks with Russia</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/europe/ukraine-serbia-russia.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/europe/ukraine-serbia-russia.html</a>
GIST	<p>BELGRADE, Serbia — Mindful of the angry and still-unhealed wounds left by NATO’s bombing of Serbia more than 20 years ago, Ukraine’s ambassador appeared on Serbian television after <a href="#">Russia invaded and bombed his country</a> in the hope of rousing sympathy.</p> <p>Instead of getting time to explain Ukraine’s misery, however, the ambassador, Oleksandr Aleksandrovych, had to sit through rants by pro-Russian Serbian commentators, and long videos of Russia’s president, Vladimir V. Putin, denouncing Ukraine as a nest of Nazis. The show, broadcast by the pro-government Happy TV, lasted three hours, more than half of which featured Mr. Putin.</p>

Angry at the on-air ambush, the ambassador complained to the producer about the pro-Kremlin propaganda exercise, but was told not to take it personally and that Mr. Putin “is good for our ratings.”

That Russia’s leader, viewed by many in the West, including President Biden, as [a war criminal](#), serves in Serbia as a lure for viewers is a reminder that the Kremlin still has admirers in Europe.

While Germany, Poland and several other E.U. countries display solidarity with Ukraine by flying its flag outside their Belgrade embassies, a nearby street pays tribute to Mr. Putin. A mural painted on the wall features an image of the Russian leader alongside the Serbian word for “brother.”

Part of Mr. Putin’s allure lies in his image as a strongman, an appealing model for President Aleksandar Vucic, [the increasingly authoritarian leader of Serbia](#), and Prime Minister Viktor Orban, [the belligerently illiberal leader](#) of Hungary. Facing elections on Sunday, the Serbian and Hungarian leaders also look to Russia as a reliable source of energy to keep their voters happy. Opinion polls suggest both will win.

Then there is history, or at least a mythologized version of the past, that, in the case of Serbia, presents Russia, a fellow Slavic and Orthodox Christian nation, as an unwavering friend and protector down the centuries.

But perhaps most important is Mr. Putin’s role as a lodestar for nations that, no matter what their past crimes, see themselves as sufferers, not aggressors, and whose politics and psyche revolve around cults of victimhood nurtured by resentment and grievance against the West.

Arijan Djan, a Belgrade-based psychotherapist, said she had been shocked by the lack of empathy among many Serbs for the suffering of Ukrainians but realized that many still bore the scars of past trauma that obliterated all feeling for the pain of others.

“Individuals who suffer traumas that they have never dealt with cannot feel empathy,” she said. Societies, like trauma-scarred individuals, she added, “just repeat the same stories of their own suffering over and over again,” a broken record that “deletes all responsibility” for what they have done to others.

A sense of victimhood runs deep in Serbia, viewing crimes committed by ethnic kin during the Balkan wars of the 1990s as a defensive response to suffering visited on Serbs, just as Mr. Putin presents his bloody invasion of Ukraine as a righteous effort to protect persecuted ethnic Russians who belong in “Rusky mir,” or the “Russian world.”

“Putin’s ‘Russian world’ is an exact copy of what our nationalists call Greater Serbia,” said Bosko Jaksic, a pro-Western newspaper columnist. Both, he added, feed on partly remembered histories of past injustice and erased memories of their own sins.

The victim narrative is so strong among some in Serbia that Informer, a raucous tabloid newspaper that often reflects the thinking of Mr. Vucic, the president, last month reported Russia’s preparations for its invasion of Ukraine with a front-page headline recasting Moscow as a blameless innocent: [“Ukraine attacks Russia!”](#) it screamed.

The Serbian government, wary of burning bridges with the West but sensitive to widespread public sympathy for Russia as a fellow wronged victim, has since [pushed news outlets](#) to take a more neutral stand, said Zoran Gavrilovic, the executive director of Birodi, an independent media monitoring group in Serbia. Russia is almost never criticized, he said, but abuse of Ukraine has subsided.

Mr. Aleksandrovych, the Ukrainian ambassador to Serbia, said he welcomed the change of tone but that he still struggled to get Serbians to look beyond their own suffering at NATO’s hands in 1999. “Because of the trauma of what happened 23 years ago, whatever bad happens in the world is seen as America’s fault,” he said.

Hungary, allied with the losing side in two world wars, also nurses an oversize victim complex, rooted in the loss of large chunks of its territory. Mr. Orban has stoked those resentments eagerly for years, often siding with Russia over Ukraine, which controls a slice of former Hungarian land and has featured prominently in his efforts to present himself as a defender of ethnic Hungarians living beyond the country's border.

In neighboring Serbia, Mr. Vucic, anxious to avoid alienating pro-Russia voters ahead of Sunday's election, has balked at imposing sanctions on Russia and at suspending flights between Belgrade and Moscow. But Serbia did vote in favor of [a United Nations resolution on March 2 condemning Russia's invasion](#).

That was enough to win praise for Mr. Vucic from Victoria Nuland, an American under secretary of state, who thanked Serbia ["for its support for Ukraine."](#) But it did not stop Russia's foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, from on Monday suggesting Belgrade as a good place to hold peace talks between Moscow and Kyiv.

Serbs who want their country to join the European Union and stop dancing between East and West accuse Mr. Vucic of playing a double game. "There are tectonic changes taking place and we are trying to sleep through them," said Vladimir Medjak, vice president of European Movement Serbia, a lobbying group pushing for E.U. membership.

Serbia, he said, is "not so much pro-Russian as NATO-hating."

Instead of moving toward Europe, he added: "We are still talking about what happened in the 1990s. It is an endless loop. We are stuck talking about the same things over and over."

More than two decades after the fighting ended in the Balkans, many Serbs still dismiss war crimes in Srebrenica, where Serb soldiers massacred more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in 1995, and in Kosovo, where brutal Serb persecution of ethnic Albanians prompted NATO's 1999 bombing campaign, as the flip side of suffering inflicted on ethnic Serbs.

Asked whether she approved of the war unleashed by Mr. Putin as she walked by the Belgrade mural in his honor, Milica Zuric, a 25-year-old bank worker, responded by asking why Western media focused on Ukraine's agonies when "you had no interest in Serbian pain" caused by NATO warplanes in 1999. "Nobody cried over what happened to us," she said.

With much of the world's media focused last week on Russia's destruction of Mariupol, the Ukrainian port city, Serbia commemorated the start of NATO's bombing campaign. Front pages were plastered with photos of buildings and railway lines destroyed by NATO. "We cannot forget. We know what it is to live under bombardment," read the headline of Kurir, a pro-government tabloid.

A small group of protesters gathered outside the United States Embassy and then joined a much bigger pro-Russia demonstration, with protesters waving Russian flags and banners adorned with the letter Z, which has become an emblem of support for Russia's invasion.

Damnjan Knezevic, the leader of People's Patrol, a far-right group that organized the gathering, said he felt solidarity with Russia because it had been portrayed as an aggressor in the West, just as Serbia was in the 1990s, when, he believes, "Serbia was in reality the biggest victim." Russia had a duty to protect ethnic kin in Ukraine just as Serbia did in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo, Mr. Knezevic said.

Bosko Obradovic, the leader of Dveri, a conservative party, said he lamented civilian casualties in Ukraine but insisted that "NATO has a huge responsibility" for their fate.

Mr. Obradovic on Sunday gathered cheering supporters for a pre-election rally in a Belgrade movie house. A stall outside the entrance sold Serbian paratrooper berets, military caps and big Russian flags.

	<p>Predrag Markovic, director for the Institute of Contemporary History in Belgrade, said that history served as the bedrock of nationhood but, distorted by political agendas, “always offers the wrong lessons.” The only case of a country in Europe fully acknowledging its past crimes, he added, was Germany after World War II.</p> <p>“Everyone else has a story of victimization.” Mr. Markovic said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Yemen overlapping cease-fires</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/middleeast/yemen-houthis-saudi-coalition-cease-fire.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/middleeast/yemen-houthis-saudi-coalition-cease-fire.html</a>
GIST	<p>SANA, Yemen — The Saudi-led coalition fighting the Houthi rebels in Yemen began a unilateral cease-fire on Wednesday, saying it hoped to pave the way toward ending a seven-year war that has shaken the security of the Persian Gulf and caused one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises.</p> <p>The coalition cease-fire will overlap, at least through Wednesday, with a separate cease-fire declared by the Houthis over the weekend. That cease-fire was supposed to end Wednesday evening if the coalition did not meet the Houthis’ demands, which included lifting the blockade on their territory and releasing all of their prisoners.</p> <p>The coalition is unlikely to agree immediately to all the demands, but diplomats involved in the process expressed hope that progress toward a broader truce could be made before the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which is expected to begin on Saturday.</p> <p>“It’s one step, hopefully in the right direction,” said Afrah Nasser, a Yemen researcher for Human Rights Watch. “But it’s still not enough and the scale of the tragedy in Yemen deserves more and more effort.”</p> <p>Ms. Nasser said greater international involvement from bodies such as the United Nations Security Council is needed to push the sides toward real peace.</p> <p>“Without political and international political backing, I think there is a great risk that we will go back to point zero,” she said.</p> <p>The war in Yemen began in 2014, when Houthi rebels seized control of the capital, Sana, and much of the country’s northwest, sending the government into exile. A military coalition of Arab countries, led by Saudi Arabia, intervened in 2015, aiming to push back the Houthis and restore the government.</p> <p>The fighting then settled into a stalemate that has ravaged the economy of the already-poor country and set off epidemics of cholera and other illnesses.</p> <p>The war has killed tens of thousands of people inside Yemen and is increasingly spilling outside its borders. The Houthis, who have received military and political support from Iran, have launched drone and missile attacks at Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, another coalition member.</p> <p>An attack last week claimed by the Houthis on an oil facility set two storage tanks in the western Saudi city of Jeddah ablaze, sending up a giant fireball and filling the sky with black smoke. The Houthis have also claimed attacks on the Emirates, with which Yemen does not even share a border.</p> <p>The United States has not participated directly in the war, but has sold Saudi Arabia and its allies much of their military hardware and provided them with help defending against attacks from Yemen.</p> <p>The United Nations and a range of Arab and Western diplomats have been trying for years to end the war, with little progress. The warring sides announced unilateral cease-fires in April 2020, not long after the start of the coronavirus pandemic, but failed to make headway on a broader peace and returned to fighting.</p>



The coalition announced its cease-fire at a Yemen-focused conference in Riyadh, the Saudi capital, bringing together officials from around the Persian Gulf and representatives of the Yemeni government and allied factions.

The United Nations welcomed the simultaneous cease-fires and called on the parties to work toward “a comprehensive negotiated settlement to end the conflict.”

The U.S. special envoy for Yemen, Timothy A. Lenderking, told the Riyadh conference on Wednesday that a United Nations proposal for an immediate truce “could serve as a first step toward a comprehensive cease-fire and a new, more inclusive political process.”

The Houthis refused to attend the talks in Riyadh, saying that negotiations should be held in a neutral country.

At the opening of the Riyadh conference on Wednesday, Nayef Al-Hajraf, secretary general of the Gulf Cooperation Council, a club of Gulf Arab monarchies, called progress toward peace “not an option, but a reality that must be achieved.”

“It has been proven that there is no solution but a peaceful one and that the war and its seven years of hardship cannot achieve the desired security and stability,” he said.

One Houthi official, Muhammad al-Bukhaiti, told The New York Times that the continuation of the Houthi cease-fire was contingent on the coalition lifting the blockade, raising the question of whether the group would resume its attacks.

“The continuation of blockade means a continuation of military operations,” he said. “If the blockade isn’t lifted, that means that the Saudis’ initiative is meaningless. Therefore, our military operations aimed at breaking the blockade will continue, focusing on targeting Saudi oil facilities.”

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HEADLINE	03/31 What is the Wagner Group?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/31/world/europe/wagner-group-russia-ukraine.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/31/world/europe/wagner-group-russia-ukraine.html</a>
GIST	<p>Unless you have been on the battlefield in <a href="#">Syria</a>, <a href="#">Libya</a> or the <a href="#">Central African Republic</a>, you most likely have never heard of the Wagner Group, a private military force with close links to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia.</p> <p>Wagner forces have appeared in Ukraine, presumably to fight alongside Russian troops in Mr. Putin’s war. In the past month, the <a href="#">number</a> of Wagner troops in the country has more than tripled to over 1,000. Their presence, in the eastern region known as Donbas that is home to Russia-backed separatist groups, raises concerns, given the group’s history.</p> <p>U.N. investigators and <a href="#">rights groups</a> say Wagner troops have targeted civilians, conducted mass executions and looted private property in conflict zones.</p> <p>Here’s what you need to know about Wagner:</p> <p><b>How did Wagner get its start?</b></p> <p>The entity first emerged in 2014, during Russia’s annexation of Crimea. The U.S. government has said that the organization is financed by Yevgeny V. Prigozhin, a Russian businessman and a close associate of Mr. Putin. He has been referred to as “Putin’s chef” because of his catering business, which has staged elaborate state banquets for Mr. Putin.</p> <p><b>How did the group get its name?</b></p> <p>The group reportedly took its name from the nom de guerre of its leader, Dmitry Utkin, a retired Russian military officer. Mr. Utkin is said to have chosen Wagner to honor the composer, who was a favorite of</p>

Hitler's. Despite the Kremlin's denial of any ties to Wagner, Mr. Utkin [has been photographed](#) next to Mr. Putin.

#### **Where is the group based?**

The group is not registered as a legal entity anywhere in the world. Mercenaries are illegal under Russian law. Their shadowy existence allows Russia to downplay its battlefield casualties and distance itself from atrocities committed by Wagner fighters, observers say.

#### **Why are the mercenaries in Ukraine?**

With Russia suffering heavy losses, according to U.S. intelligence, Mr. Putin is sending battle-hardened reinforcements with experience into Ukraine, according to experts, including Jeremy Fleming, the director of Britain's electronic surveillance agency.

"These soldiers are likely to be used as cannon fodder to try to limit Russian military losses," he has said.

#### **Where do they recruit?**

Some of the fighters appeared to have been recruited from Syria and Libya, the Pentagon's spokesman, John F. Kirby, has said. He said Russia seemed to be turning to them to bolster its troops in the east of Ukraine because the group already had experience fighting in the Donbas region for the past eight years.

#### **Where have Wagner forces been deployed?**

In addition to their involvement in Syria, Libya, Central African Republic and Ukraine, Wagner operatives have also fought in Sudan, Mali and Mozambique, exerting Russian influence by proxy, doing the bidding of authoritarian leaders and, at times, seizing oil and gas fields or securing other material interests. Increasingly, they've become more formalized and have started acting more like Western military contractors.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Russia steps up attacks; mixed messaging</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/europe/ukraine-russia-war.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/europe/ukraine-russia-war.html</a>
GIST	<p>Belying its claims of de-escalation, Russia increased bomb and artillery attacks in Ukraine on Wednesday and sent conflicting signals about the prospects for peace, suggesting new tensions in the Kremlin hierarchy about the course of the war.</p> <p>The contradictory messaging came as a newly declassified U.S. intelligence assessment suggested that President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia had been misinformed about the war's trajectory by subordinates, who were fearful of his reaction to the Russian military's struggles and setbacks.</p> <p>The intelligence, according to multiple American officials, showed Mr. Putin's isolation and what appeared to be growing tension between him and the Ministry of Defense, including with his defense minister, Sergei K. Shoigu, who was once among the most trusted members of the Kremlin inner circle and had been rumored to be a possible successor one day to Mr. Putin.</p> <p>It was not clear whether the release of the declassified intelligence was intended to sow anxiety within Mr. Putin's circle as part of a broader information battle between the United States and Russia over Ukraine, the source of the worst tensions between the two nuclear powers since the Cold War. Nor was it clear if the intelligence was accurate.</p> <p>But American intelligence officials have proved right so far in their assessments of Mr. Putin's intentions toward Ukraine, beginning with the Russian troop buildup along its borders last year that culminated in the Feb. 24 invasion.</p> <p>White House officials said that they had released the intelligence to share what they said was a "full understanding" of how Mr. Putin had miscalculated.</p>

“We believe he’s being misinformed by his advisers about how badly the Russian military is performing and how the Russian economy is being crippled by sanctions,” Kate Bedingfield, the White House communications director, told reporters.

Asked about the declassified assessment during a trip to Algiers, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said it was not surprising that Mr. Putin was ill-informed.

“One of the Achilles’ heels of autocracies,” he said, “is that you don’t have people in those systems who speak truth to power or who have the ability to speak truth to power. And I think that is something that we’re seeing in Russia.”

The latest assessment also appeared to track with the mixed messages from the Kremlin on Wednesday about peace talks with Ukraine this week in Istanbul. The chief Russian negotiator described them as promising, but was basically contradicted by the Kremlin’s top spokesman.

New Russian attacks in Ukraine, on the northern city of Chernihiv and the suburbs of Kyiv, also appeared to reflect disarray in Kremlin messaging, coming one day after the Russian military said it was de-escalating in those areas. They suggested that Mr. Putin might be stalling for time, redeploying his invasion forces elsewhere in the country and girding for a protracted conflict.

Mr. Putin’s ultimate aim, however, remains murky.

With the war about to enter its sixth week, its calamitous economic and humanitarian impact has widened. Germany has taken the first steps toward rationing natural gas, in anticipation of Russia potentially cutting off deliveries; the total number of Ukrainian refugees has surpassed four million — half of them children; and the United Nations is forecasting the most dire world hunger crisis since World War II. Ukraine and Russia are ordinarily major suppliers of the world’s wheat and other grains.

The Chernihiv region, which extends to the border with Belarus, appeared to have been targeted with intense Russian strikes early Wednesday, hours after Russia had vowed to sharply reduce combat in that area and near Kyiv. Both were early targets of the Russian invaders, who were stymied by intense and unexpectedly stiff Ukrainian resistance.

“Yesterday, the Russians publicly stated that they were reducing their offensive actions and activity in the Chernihiv and Kyiv areas,” the Chernihiv governor, Vyacheslav Chaus, said in a statement posted on the Telegram social media app. “Do we believe that? Of course not.”

Mr. Chaus said that “civil infrastructure has been destroyed again” by Russian strikes. “Libraries, shopping malls and other facilities have been destroyed, and many houses have been destroyed,” he said. “Because, in fact, the enemy roamed Chernihiv all night.”

In Kyiv, the regional military administration said in a Wednesday post on its Telegram channel that “more than 30 shellings by Russian troops of housing estates and social infrastructure” in the Kyiv region had been recorded over the previous 24 hours.

The mixed messaging from Russia on Wednesday raised questions about whether progress in the peace talks was real.

The lead Russian negotiator in the talks, Vladimir Medinsky, said on Russia’s state television that they appeared to be verging on a breakthrough. Mr. Medinsky said Ukraine’s proposal to declare neutrality, among what he called other concessions, represented its readiness for “building normal and, I hope, good neighborly relations with Russia.”

That language clashed markedly with hard-line rhetoric emanating from Moscow, where supporters of the war, who do not consider Ukraine to be a legitimate country, denounced Mr. Medinsky’s diplomacy as bordering on traitorous.

“Any talks with Nazis before your boot is on their throat are perceived as weakness,” Vladimir Solovyov, a popular state television host, said on his YouTube show, reprising the Kremlin’s false characterization of the Ukrainian government. “You cannot meet with them or talk to them.”

And the Kremlin’s chief spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, was far more cautious in his own comments than Mr. Medinsky. He said that Ukraine’s willingness to put some proposals in writing was a “positive factor,” but that “we do not see anything very promising or any breakthroughs.”

Russia first signaled last week that it was recalibrating the aims of what Mr. Putin has described as a “special military operation” in Ukraine, no longer focusing on seizing Kyiv and other important cities in the north and west of the country but instead on securing the eastern region, known as the Donbas. Russian-backed separatists have been fighting there since 2014.

The Russian Defense Ministry has cast its decision to wind down military operations around Kyiv as a good-faith gesture of de-escalation, but it appeared to be an attempt to explain away a battlefield defeat.

On Wednesday, the ministry said Russian forces around Kyiv were “regrouping,” although that assertion could not be independently confirmed. And it claimed that all along, the aim of gathering forces near Kyiv had not been to take the city but to tie up and weaken Ukrainian troops in the area.

“All these goals were achieved,” the ministry said in a statement, adding that it would now focus on “the final stage of the operation to liberate” the Donbas area.

The secretary of Ukraine’s national security council, Oleksiy Danilov, said Wednesday that at least part of the Russian military’s assertions appeared to be accurate. Some Russian units were relocating to eastern Ukraine and “the enemy is intensifying its formations there,” he said.

But Mr. Danilov cautioned that it would be premature to conclude that Russia had abandoned a push toward the capital, even if it was relocating some troops.

In the Donetsk part of Donbas, fighting escalated on Wednesday, the Ukrainian military said in a statement, as Russian forces “intensified fire and assault operations” with air and missile strikes. Ukraine’s military also reported Russian shelling and bomb strikes in the eastern city of Kharkiv, one of the invasion’s early targets.

Casualties in the war are difficult to confirm. The United Nations, which keeps a daily tally, said Wednesday that at least 1,189 people had been killed so far, although that is almost certainly an undercount.

The possible legal consequences for Russia over its targeting of civilian structures in Ukraine — a potential war crime — moved forward on Wednesday with the formation of a United Nations panel of inquiry. The three-person panel, named by the U.N. Human Rights Council, will “establish the facts, circumstances and root causes” of any crimes arising from the invasion, the council said.

Amid the litany of negative news, there was one potential bright spot: A NASA astronaut returned to Earth on Wednesday with two Russian colleagues, suggesting that despite their antipathy over the crisis in Ukraine, the United States and Russia could still collaborate in space.

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HEADLINE	03/30 Health officials: ‘pandemic is not over’
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/omicron-ba2-pandemic-covid/281-7c5f5f95-96ce-450f-a95f-5e89f2ff4837">https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/omicron-ba2-pandemic-covid/281-7c5f5f95-96ce-450f-a95f-5e89f2ff4837</a>

GIST	<p>TUMWATER, Wash. — Less than a month after it accounted for less than 8% of sequenced cases in Washington, the BA.2 subvariant of the COVID-19 omicron variant is now the dominant strain of the virus across the state.</p> <p>The latest genomic sequencing of positive COVID cases across the state conducted from March 13-19 showed that more than 51% were caused by the BA.2 variant.</p> <p>While the subvariant, which has wreaked havoc in other parts of the world, has achieved dominance in the state, Department of Health (DOH) officials say that overall COVID cases and hospitalizations are continuing to decline.</p> <p>Despite some upticks in King and Snohomish counties over the last week or so, case rates across the state are nearly at levels not seen since July of last year, according to Health Secretary Dr. Umair Shah. Hospitalization rates are already back to the July 2021 levels.</p> <p>Still, Shah warned, this isn't the first time the state has seen a break in COVID-19, adding that everyone needs to keep in mind the tools already available, including masks when appropriate and vaccines.</p> <p>"This is an interim period. So, this is what we have seen many times and hopefully, we will see a different place here from what we've seen previously," Shah said during a DOH briefing Wednesday. "Previously we would see declines and then we would see a surge. We're hopeful we do not see a surge and that we continue to see declines and that COVID-19 fades into the horizon."</p> <p>Deputy Secretary Lacy Fehrenbach said that even though BA.2 appears to be more transmissible than the original variant it does not seem to cause more severe illness. She said that just 6% of hospital beds across the state are taken up by COVID patients.</p> <p>Fehrenbach added that some of the increases being seen in certain areas of the state and across the country are likely due to the combination of a number of factors like lower masking rates, waning immunity and more activity.</p> <p>While Shah didn't suggest the state is anywhere near reimplementing COVID restrictions like universal masking, he did say that if there were a statewide surge, the DOH would look at various policies to potentially implement to stop the spread.</p> <p>"The pandemic is not over," he said. "We have all the tools now. We know what the tools are and how to use them."</p> <p>So far, more than 81% of eligible Washingtonians have received at least one dose of the vaccine, and more than 73% are fully vaccinated. Additionally, about 58% of people 12 years and older have gotten an additional booster dose.</p> <p>DOH officials are encouraging residents to also continue wearing masks while inside with poor ventilation or among crowds.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 USDA: no slowdown in rising food prices</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/rising-food-prices-wont-slow-down-per-usda/RJPSHKG55BB3NFT6F2CRQZIEU/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/rising-food-prices-wont-slow-down-per-usda/RJPSHKG55BB3NFT6F2CRQZIEU/</a>
GIST	<p>Food prices are rising and likely will continue going up throughout the year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).</p> <p>"All food prices are now predicted to increase between 4.5 and 5.5 percent," the USDA stated in its 2022 <a href="#">Food Price Outlook report</a>.</p>

USDA data shows how much food prices have increased since last year. Comparing prices from February 2021 to February 2022, the agency found the cost of food at home/groceries is up 8.6%. They also found the following increases:

- Beef and Veal: +16.2%
- Pork: +14%
- Poultry: +12.5%
- Fish and Seafood: +10.4%
- Eggs: +11.4%
- Dairy: +5.2%
- Fats and Oils: +11.7%
- Fresh Fruits: +10.6%
- Fresh Vegetables: +4.3%
- Processed Fruits and Vegetables: +7.6%
- Sugars and Sweets: +7%
- Cereals and Bakery Products: +7.8%

Wheat prices also are expected to rise significantly due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, according to USDA.

“The conflict in Ukraine is expected to put upward pressure on international wheat markets,” the report stated. “Farm-level wheat prices are now predicted to increase between 20 and 23 percent and wholesale wheat flour prices are predicted to increase between 12 and 15 percent in 2022.”

Ukraine is also the world’s largest exporter of sunflower oil, making up nearly half of the global supply.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 DOH briefing: ‘positive trends in state’</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/doh-discusses-covid-19-outlook/5GUMFM12ORBYZE3FWF3BSSIKII/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/doh-discusses-covid-19-outlook/5GUMFM12ORBYZE3FWF3BSSIKII/</a>
GIST	<p>Officials with the Washington State Department of Health held a briefing Wednesday morning concerning COVID-19, and they said things are looking positive.</p> <p>DOH said more than 13 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine had been administered in Washington, which propelled the state to one of the highest vaccination rates in the country. It also helped to lower the death rate.</p> <p>COVID cases are down in the state, which means the briefings could become less frequent.</p> <p>“Overall, (we are) continuing to see positive trends in our state, which remains very hopeful news and continuing good news for all of us,” Dr. Umair Shah, the Washington Secretary of Health, said during a briefing. “In Washington, the trajectory of cases continues to be on the decline, and that again is fantastic news.”</p> <p>“We’re also watching BA.2 across the country and across the globe, and it is true now that BA.2 has become the dominant strain for COVID-19, positive cases, in the state of Washington,” said Shah.</p> <p>The DOH still stressed the best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is through vaccines, tests and mask wearing.</p> <p>Although some mandates have dropped across the state, DOH said people should hold on to their masks.</p> <p>“It is true that with low numbers and (a) lower potential for exposure that we do have the situation where many folks are saying, ‘I don’t need to wear a mask ever,’ and what we are continuing to remind people that it’s an additional layer of safety,” said Shah.</p> <p>DOH said that masking in crowded indoor spaces or older buildings will still provide some prevention.</p>

The agency said spring break travel to a hot spot during COVID-19 could also mean wearing a mask in certain instances.

“Wear masks, have tests on hand. If you need any tests, you can order from [sayyescovidhometest.org](https://sayyescovidhometest.org),” said Lacy Fehrenbach with DOH.

“We want to make sure that those people who have moderate or severe immunocompromised, who are at higher risk of hospitalization or death from COVID-19, know about a preventive monoclonal antibody treatment called Evusheld that can provide six months of protection from COVID-19,” DOH Chief Science Officer Tao Sheng Kwan Gett said.

DOH said this new monoclonal antibody treatment is available to people as an injection that could be obtained from a doctor.

“We are hopeful we do not see a surge and that we continue to see declines,” Shah said.

While there is a fourth booster shot option for those over 50, it has proven to be controversial.

In the last few days, medical experts at the University of Washington have said they have not seen the data on whether a fourth shot would work or offer more protection.

The experts said they want to wait and see the data to determine its effectiveness.

They also said the focus should be on getting unvaccinated people vaccinated and getting others boosted.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Concern: homeless camp fires on rise</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-firefighters-have-gone-to-260-homeless-camp-fires-in-2022-already">https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-firefighters-have-gone-to-260-homeless-camp-fires-in-2022-already</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — A propane tank fueled blaze at a homeless encampment in Seattle's Ballard neighborhood Wednesday has prompted more concern in the neighborhood about the dangers posed by camps even as city data shows that the reported incidents of fires at the sites have risen recently.</p> <p>The city of Seattle started recording homeless encampment fire calls last year and the data shows that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In Aug. 2021, there were 126 total fires logged for the month.</li><li>• There was 539 recorded homeless camp fire calls between August and Dec. 31, 2021, an average of 3.5 per day or about 107 per month.</li><li>• The numbers for 2022 do appear better, with 101 calls in January, 80 in February and 79 in March, so far.</li></ul> <p>These numbers translate to 2.9 calls for service a day and 86.7 per month, and the actual calls responded too, though, are much higher.</p> <p>The Seattle Fire Department said it has responded to 416 encampment fires so far this year, this includes illegal burns and rubbish fires. During the same time period last year, the department responded to 290.</p> <p>A spokesman for the fire department said the agency implemented a new dispatch type-code last August to better track the numbers of reported fires at encampments.</p> <p>"That's helping us have better visibility at the department and city level, though we did previously track encampment fires via a different methodology prior to 2021," the spokesman said. "Compared to the first quarter of last year, there has been a rise in the number of encampment fires that we've responded to so far in 2022."</p>



One of those fires occurred early Wednesday at a Ballard encampment located at 15th Ave. NW and NW 51st Street.

No injuries were reported from the blaze, which was reported around 4:30 a.m.

News of the fire reached the mayor's office at Seattle City Hall.

"Mayor Harrell is committed to advancing sustainable solutions to public safety and homelessness with urgency and action, including where these issue areas intersect," his office said in a written statement. "The mayor believes everyone in Seattle should feel safe. To that end, the mayor will continue to drive forward efforts to address immediate public safety issues and help those living unsheltered move out of tents and into shelter and housing with services."

A resident who was awakened by the blaze and filmed it on his phone spoke to KOMO News on condition of anonymity, saying he is planning on moving from the area because he is weary of the cost of living and homeless crisis in the city. .

"I thought it was morning when i woke up (and) I thought I slept past my alarm," he said about waking up to flames. "It was so bright and orange in my window. I opened my window and I was like, 'Oh my gosh! What is going on?'"

The fire ignited nearby utility lines for CenturyLink and Xfinity, knocking out internet access for many customers in the area.

An encampment fire has sparked more concerns about safety in the Ballard area.

Workers at a nearby Amazon Fresh store said their internet was out, forcing them to rely on WiFi hot spots, which was only providing "spotty" access.' and they

An employee of Les Schwab told KOMO News that the office's phone and internet service were both out, preventing its customers from being able to process payments with the company's credit card system.

Officials said the area could be without internet or phone service until at least midnight if not later.

Kelly Watkins, who works and lives in the area, said she knows the homeless man who lives at the corner of 15th Avenue NW and NW 51st Street, the suspected site of where the blaze began.

"I heard what I thought was gunshots, but it was actually propane tanks exploding," she said. "I watched (the fire) go up the telephone pole (and) watched the spinning propane tanks on fire. It was huge i mean it's climbing up the telephone pole (and) you could see the transformer that exploded."

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HEADLINE	03/30 DNR carrying out 'prescribed burn'
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/washington-state-dnr-carrying-out-prescribed-burn-for-the-first-time-in-years">https://www.q13fox.com/news/washington-state-dnr-carrying-out-prescribed-burn-for-the-first-time-in-years</a>
GIST	<p><b>LOOMIS, Wash.</b> - For the first time in several years, the <a href="#">Washington State Department of Natural Resources</a> will be carrying out a <a href="#">prescribed burn on state land</a>, starting as early as Thursday if weather conditions permit.</p> <p>The purpose of the <a href="#">burn is to help reduce the likelihood of catastrophic wildfires</a> by burning brush and needles. It is also supposed to help with dense overgrowth.</p> <p>DNR said the fires are controlled and monitored to make sure they don't get out of hand.</p> <p>"The phrase people might hear is something called a burn prescription. And it is similar to a healthcare prescription, very trained, highly-technical professionals go out, and they examine the land, they walk the</p>

	land, they map the land and determine what type of prescribed fires work for an area, if prescribed fires work for an area. And most importantly, what kind of resources they need and personnel equipment to keep it under control," Will Rubin of DNR told FOX 13.
	The burn will take place in Okanogan County, near Loomis, and will cover about 260 acres of land.
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 CDC drops cruise ship health warning</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/cdc-covid-19-health-warning-cruise-ship-travelers">https://www.q13fox.com/news/cdc-covid-19-health-warning-cruise-ship-travelers</a>
GIST	<p><b>WASHINGTON</b> - Federal health officials are dropping the warning they have attached to <a href="#">cruising since the beginning of the pandemic</a>, leaving it up to vacationers to decide whether they feel safe getting on a ship.</p> <p>Cruise-ship operators welcomed Wednesday's announcement, which came as many people thought about summer vacation plans.</p> <p>An industry trade group said the move by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention validated measures that ship owners have taken, including requiring crew members and most passengers to be vaccinated against the virus.</p> <p>The CDC removed the <a href="#">COVID-19</a> "cruise ship travel health notice" that was first imposed in March 2020, after virus outbreaks on several ships around the world.</p> <p>However, the agency expressed reservations about cruising.</p> <p>"While cruising will always pose some risk of COVID-19 transmission, travelers will make their own risk assessment when choosing to travel on a cruise ship, much like they do in all other travel settings," CDC spokesman Dave Daigle said in an email.</p> <p>Daigle said the CDC's decision was based on "the current state of the pandemic and decreases in COVID-19 cases onboard cruise ships over the past several weeks."</p> <p>COVID-19 cases in the United States have been falling since mid-January, although the decline has slowed in recent weeks, and the current seven-day rolling average for daily new cases in the U.S. is roughly unchanged from two weeks ago, according to figures from Johns Hopkins University. States have rolled back mask mandates, putting pressure on federal officials to ease virus-related restrictions.</p> <p><a href="#">Cruise-ship operators</a> have complained since the start of the pandemic that their industry has been singled out for a shutdown and then tighter COVID-19 restrictions than others, including airlines.</p> <p>The Cruise Lines International Association said in a statement that the CDC's decision to remove its health warning "recognizes the effective public health measures in place on cruise ships and begins to level the playing field between cruise and similarly situated venues on land."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 DOH: 1,454,772 cases, 12,478 deaths</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article259953155.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article259953155.html</a>
GIST	<p>The Washington state Department of Health reported 954 new COVID-19 cases Wednesday.</p> <p>As of Wednesday, the state's preliminary death tally was 12,478. The confirmed death tally as of March 13 was 12,394. The statewide case total from the illness caused by the coronavirus stood at 1,454,772 cases on Wednesday.</p> <p>The state reported 621 cases on Tuesday.</p>

HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Panel expands police misconduct review</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/wa-panel-now-will-consider-past-offenses-when-deciding-whether-to-take-an-officers-badge/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/wa-panel-now-will-consider-past-offenses-when-deciding-whether-to-take-an-officers-badge/</a>
GIST	<p>The newly expanded Criminal Justice Training Commission, its membership now including relatives of people who died at the hands of police, on Wednesday voted to increase the commission's ability to take the badges and guns of troubled law enforcement officers even if the wrongdoing occurred years ago and went unpunished at the time.</p> <p>The commission voted 14-4 in favor of applying the provisions of Senate Bill 5051, passed by the state Legislature last year, to all future police decertification actions, regardless of when the misconduct occurred. That means that the new provisions, <a href="#">which greatly expand the circumstances when officers can lose their badges</a>, can be applied to misconduct that occurred even before the law took effect on July 25, 2021.</p> <p>"We need to help restore the credibility and trust of law enforcement in our communities," said Tim Reynon, a Puyallup Tribal Council member and one of the newly appointed commission members who drove the vote home. "Misconduct that occurred before July 25 is still misconduct.</p> <p>"Accountability doesn't have a deadline," he said.</p> <p>The four "no" votes all came from commission members in the law enforcement community, including outgoing King County Prosecutor Dan Satterberg, who worried that the commission could be "swamped" with decertification actions and not get anything done. From a legal standpoint, Satterberg also said applying the expanded provisions to misconduct that occurred only after the July 2021 implementation date would create a "bright line of jurisdiction" and avoid a muddled process.</p> <p>The other "no" votes came from Lewis County Sheriff Robert Snaza, Vancouver Police Officer Jeffrey Anaya, and Kitsap County Corrections Director Penelope Sapp. <a href="#">The new law</a> for the first time requires certification of corrections officers and empowers the commission to revoke it for misconduct.</p> <p>The vote came after a consortium of 40 activist and civil rights groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington and the Washington Coalition for Police Accountability — comprising mostly family members who have lost someone to police violence — <a href="#">urged the statute's retroactive application in a letter sent to the commission in February</a>. The letter was sparked by a movement among law enforcement officials to limit its application to misconduct that occurred after the date the statute took effect.</p> <p>Several of those family members now sit as commissioners on the CJTC, and they were adamant — and emotional — that no significant misconduct be excluded from decertification scrutiny, regardless of when it occurred.</p> <p>"The officer who murdered my son ... got away with misconduct," said Commissioner Sonia Joseph, the mother of Giovanni Joseph-McDade, an unarmed 20-year-old Black man who was fatally shot by Kent police in 2017 following an alleged traffic violation. She <a href="#">settled a lawsuit against the city last year for \$4.4 million</a>. The involved officer, William Davis, remains on the force and was not disciplined.</p> <p>Joseph was joined in her support by newly appointed citizen commissioners Annalesa Thomas, whose son <a href="#">Leonard Thomas</a> was killed by Lakewood police in 2013; Trishandra Pickup, whose former partner <a href="#">Stonechild Chiefstick</a> was killed by Poulsbo police in 2019; Katrina Johnson, whose cousin <a href="#">Charleena Lyles</a> was killed by Seattle police in 2017; and Nickeia Hunter, whose brother <a href="#">Carlos Hunter</a>, was shot by Vancouver police in 2019.</p>

Commissioner Kurtis Robinson, the former president of the Spokane NAACP and who has been in prison, said he experienced unpunished police misconduct firsthand in his past while drug addicted and on the streets.

“Nobody should be able to walk up and kick a handcuffed person in the gonads, call him racial slurs and be handed his badge and gun,” he said. Understanding that implementing the new process may be controversial shouldn’t be a hindrance, he added.

“There’s going to be risks if we’re going to move the needle,” Robinson said. “We got to get to it.”

Outgoing commission Chairman Jeffrey Myers, chief of the Hoquiam Police Department, had drafted a proposal that would have made the July 25, 2021, implementation date a “bright line” cutoff for application of the SB 5051 provisions. It was rejected in favor of Robinson’s motion to allow the measure to be applied retroactively.

Even so, Myers supported the vote, as did Washington State Patrol Chief John Batiste.

The expanded law allows for the commission to conduct an investigation and move for decertification whether or not the involved agency cooperates. It also has provisions aimed at halting the practice of “cop-hopping,” where a troubled officer resigns from a department in lieu of discipline or termination, enabling that officer to go to another agency with their law-enforcement certification intact.

A [2020 investigation by The Seattle Times](#) showed that only a small percentage of officers fired for misconduct had their certification revoked by the commission, and that the state had never pulled an officer’s badge for excessive use of force.

A 17-page analysis of the measure and the Legislature’s intent conducted by the Washington Attorney General’s Office for the commission concluded that lawmakers intended “the criteria in [the new statute] to apply to any future certification decision, regardless of when the underlying misconduct occurred.” However, the attorney general acknowledged “that there is some risk a court could disagree, or that a court could find that applying the statute based on past conduct is unconstitutional.”

Olympia civil rights attorney Leslie Cushman, author of I-940, a citizen’s initiative that significantly changed the statute governing when police could be charged with homicide, and a member of the Coalition for Police Accountability, praised the CJTC’s “decisive action.”

“The result is that all officers in the state will be treated the same, subject to high standards addressing suitability to be a peace officer,” she said in a statement. “The alternative was unacceptable and would have created morale problems within departments and credibility issues with communities.”

“Getting ‘yes’ votes today from some law enforcement members on the Commission hopefully signals that leadership is ready to move forward and work to make a shift in police culture where problems do not get swept under the rug,” Cushman said.

Enoka Herat, an attorney who oversees police practices and immigration at the ACLU of Washington, said the vote was “an important safeguard to accountability.”

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HEADLINE	03/30 Everyone not okay; back at work anyway
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/business/return-to-office-mental-health.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/business/return-to-office-mental-health.html</a>
GIST	It’s exceptionally difficult to get someone to crack a smile, let alone laugh, in a corporate event hosted on Zoom, but comedian Dani Klein Modisett finds ways. One game she likes to play during her laughter workshops involves asking participants to each name five items in a category — for example, things in their refrigerator — as fast as they can, after which everyone else chants: “Those are five things!” Eventually people loosen up. They start giggling. (Maybe you had to be there.)

But in recent months she has noticed attendees logging in to the sessions more tense than ever. Some arrive looking for levity, but also processing tragedy.

“I’m glad I showed up,” one participant said. “But my brother-in-law just died.”

People are going into performance reviews, brainstorming sessions and the office with all kinds of grief, swinging between the banal and the crushing. Small problems feel large. Large problems feel colossal. And with mental health care hard to obtain and afford, workers are trying to fill the gaps.

“There’s this sense of ‘I don’t know how much longer I can keep doing this,’” said Klein Modisett, whose organization, Laughter on Call, has run over 350 events since its founding three years ago. “We want to hold out the possibility we can laugh, but it’s all becoming too much.”

Even the most scripted Hollywood event went sideways, its typical polish replaced with raw emotion: a slap from one of the film industry’s biggest stars.

“We’re all feeling our way around being together when we don’t know what each other’s state of well-being is,” said Chantalle Couba, 46, a diversity, equity and inclusion consultant in North Carolina. “You go to a three-day off-site — or to the Oscars — and you find out people are different. People are threadbare. They’re very anxious.”

For the past two years, people have struggled to do their work — whether in hospitals or restaurants, in shops or schools — while knotted up with the fear and uncertainty of the COVID-19 crisis.

For the subset of Americans who had the luxury of working from home, their professional lives mirrored their personal ones: upended. They answered emails from their couches, spoke to teammates on Zoom and refashioned daily schedules to accommodate this new remote-work era.

Now, some have gotten the message that their employers are trying to restore an old status quo. Dozens of companies are calling workers back to the office: Microsoft, Goldman Sachs, Chevron, The Washington Post. And some worry that their teams aren’t prepared for the emotional transition awaiting a workforce already on edge.

“Gone are the days of put your head down,” said Desiree Coleman-Fry, a diversity, equity and inclusion executive.

In a McKinsey study of more than 2,900 people last year, one-third of those who had just returned to the office said going back had negatively affected their mental health. The will-they-won’t-they saga of office reopenings hasn’t helped, making it tough to prepare for a new routine.

For some workers, there’s the difficulty of giving up habits they formed at home; for others, there’s the prospect of facing slights, insensitive comments and cliques. And many, knowing that they’ve changed in the last two years, don’t feel ready to get reacquainted with their teams.

“So much of our humanity has been exposed,” Klein Modisett said. “There’s kind of no turning back. We can’t put the genie back in the bottle.”

But the workaday duties drag on, sometimes in jarring contrast to the magnitude of world events. For Kelly McComas, 25, a designer in Brooklyn, the dissonance between following crises in the news and fulfilling her professional obligations is clearest at the start of her meetings. On a recent video call with a team in Poland, she said, the opening moments of the conversation made clear that nobody knew how to discuss Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

“We kick off a meeting and ask how everything’s going, and they’re like, ‘Well, there’s a war,’” McComas recalled. “And we’re like, ‘Yeah, there’s a war.’ And then we go into the design meeting.”

Supervisors are finding that they are called on to help people navigate personal challenges, whether or not they have the training to do so. Kim Theobald, head of human resources at RCM&D, an insurance brokerage, started facilitating a weekly call for managers, giving them space to raise questions about how to support workers.

“I’ve had a lot more employees reach out to me due to their anxiety, often saying they can’t pinpoint the reason for it,” Theobald said. “I’ve had phone calls from managers saying, ‘This is what I did, and I hope I handled it correctly.’”

Some companies are trying to directly address mental health challenges that their staff may be facing. Arrivia, a travel business, said use of its “employee assistance” program, which provides no-cost therapy, had increased tenfold since the start of the pandemic. The company has also surveyed workers about their needs around returning to the office and has written up a plan that puts a priority on flexibility, allowing many people to work from home if they prefer.

Real, a mental health app that offers programming on topics including relationships and body positivity, plans to pilot a four-day workweek, running next week through June, to give employees more time to rest and focus on their families. The idea came from Real’s founder, Ariela Safira, who recognized after the December holidays that she was experiencing a sense of numbness fueled by overwork.

Like Safira, many mental health professionals are finding this moment just as hard as the clients they serve do. April Koh, founder of Spring Health, a mental health startup that offers employees access to therapy and other services, recently realized she hadn’t fully dealt with her own pain after being targeted with a racial slur on a street in New York. When her team planned a healing circle to discuss anti-Asian violence, which has increased during the pandemic, Koh surprised herself as she wrestled publicly with questions about her personal history.

“I hadn’t expected to be so emotional,” she said. “There is kind of a shared mentality, to an extent, among Asian Americans about keeping our head down and staying invisible. It was powerful for me to be so vulnerable.”

She worries that many businesses, which had never before made an effort to address their staff’s mental health, still aren’t being proactive in helping people take care of themselves, especially with insurance plans often offering paltry mental health coverage. The average wait to see a provider was more than 20 days nationally even before the pandemic.

“Some companies take the posture where they say: ‘We’re resilient. We’re all about business. That’s what we’re going to focus on,’” Koh said. “That’s just not the way to solve problems.”

Apps and even paid time off can do only so much. For many, the angst runs deep, exacerbated by the emotional gap between their work responsibilities and the realities of 2022. Business leaders may talk often about authenticity, yet many of their employees are unsure how to present themselves to colleagues when they’re struggling.

“It feels crazy to be expected to keep your cool and go on with your life,” McComas said. “I don’t know if I can bring my full self to work anymore because it feels so disingenuous with what’s happening outside work.”

And the vocabulary of the workplace is expanding, as managers try to find the language needed to check in on employees. They’re learning to ask about challenges that go beyond deadlines and deals, conversations that don’t always feel natural in a sterile office environment.

Jennifer Strauel, head of human resources at Arrivia, has heard from employees who experienced sickness, relationship breakdowns and the loss of loved ones.

	“We’re getting comfortable using words about feelings instead of just concrete business topics,” Strauel said.
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 NYC clears homeless camps; mixed results</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/nyregion/nyc-homeless-eric-adams.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/nyregion/nyc-homeless-eric-adams.html</a>
GIST	<p>Results so far are mixed on New York City’s effort to move homeless people out of the subway system and <a href="#">street encampments</a> and into shelters, Mayor Eric Adams said Wednesday.</p> <p>The mayor, who has called the initiatives crucial to the city’s recovery from the pandemic and to addressing perceptions that it had grown less safe, and his staff said that sanitation workers in partnership with the police had cleared 239 encampments in 12 days.</p> <p>But only five people at those sites agreed to go to homeless shelters, a sign that most of them may remain outdoors and many were likely to rebuild their makeshift camps.</p> <p>During the first four weeks of the <a href="#">push to clear the subways</a>, nearly 80 people per week accepted placement in shelters, according to city figures — a jump from about 22 per week in January, before Mr. Adams <a href="#">put his subway safety plan</a> into effect.</p> <p>But city statistics for January showed that more than two-thirds of the people in the subway who agreed to go to shelters had already left them by the end of the month. City officials declined to immediately say how many of those newly referred to shelters under the city’s latest initiative remained there.</p> <p>Mr. Adams cautioned New Yorkers that the programs will take time and that a social problem that has bedeviled generations of mayors would not be solved overnight.</p> <p>“This is the first inning of a nine-inning game,” he said at a news conference at City Hall. “I’m not concerned about striking out. I’m not concerned about someone hitting our pitches. I’m concerned about the end of this game. And when this game is over, we’re going to have a city far better than the dysfunctional city that we’ve witnessed for far too long.”</p> <p>His comments seemed aimed at ratcheting down expectations he set in February, when he said of the decades-long practice of people sleeping on trains and subway platforms, “<a href="#">Those days are over</a>.” This month he <a href="#">suggested that he would have the city cleared</a> of street encampments within two weeks.</p> <p>Of the people on the street who did not agree to go to shelters, Mr. Adams said that “some went back home” to stay with loved ones and “some went to different locations.” Advocates have said that the cleanups often have the effect of simply pushing people and their possessions from one outdoor spot to another.</p> <p>Meera Joshi, the deputy mayor for operations, who appeared with Mr. Adams, stressed that the encampment removals were “not a ‘one and done,’” in part because it takes “constant communication and trust and relationship” to persuade people leery of the shelter system to head inside.</p> <p>Advocates for homeless people say that the city’s practice of sending out cleanup teams of police, sanitation workers and homeless-outreach workers and sometimes throwing away people’s belongings — something that the city denies occurs — breaks that trust.</p> <p>Mr. Adams emphasized that the city was also in the process of opening 500 beds in specialized shelters that have fewer restrictions, more on-site services and in some cases more privacy than the traditional dormlike shelters that many people who live on the street and shelter in the subway reject.</p> <p>On Tuesday, he presided at the ribbon-cutting of one such shelter, a so-called safe haven in the Bronx that offers 80 beds, an on-site health clinic, substance-abuse treatment and no curfew.</p>



“You can’t get this on the A train overnight,” he said at the opening. “You can’t get this sleeping in Times Square. You can’t get this sleeping in a cardboard box. You can’t get this sleeping in a tree in the park. You don’t deserve that. You deserve this.”

Jacquelyn Simone, the policy director for the Coalition for the Homeless, said on Wednesday that the city should shift its focus away from enforcement and more toward accelerating the creation of housing.

“Private rooms and permanent housing,” she said. “That’s what people want. You don’t have to do heavy-handed policing to convince someone to come in off the streets if you’re actually offering them an option that is safer and better than the streets.”

Ms. Simone noted that many of the 500 specialized beds Mr. Adams cited were already in the pipeline under his predecessor, Bill de Blasio. Mr. de Blasio built about 2,400 such beds during his eight-year tenure.

Likewise, Mr. Adams’s crackdown on encampments is largely a continuation of a practice that ramped up sharply during Mr. de Blasio’s last year in office, when the city averaged more than 500 cleanups per month.

When questioned about how his approach differed, Mr. Adams demurred. “I’m not sure what he did,” he said. “That was the previous administration.”

Dan Biederman, the president of the 34th Street Partnership, a business improvement district in Manhattan, said that the business owners and property owners within the district generally supported the mayor’s efforts around homelessness and public safety.

“Most of us who are in the fray believe it can’t just be outreach,” Mr. Biederman, who is also president of the Bryant Park Corporation, said. “You can’t have encampments on the street and have people feel safe.”

He also said that he believed Mr. Adams’s plan to tackle subway safety would help alleviate “the climate of fear that is affecting a lot of people who work in Manhattan and stopping some people from coming back to the office.”

Mr. Adams’s presentation included many visuals. One was a photo showing dozens of needles and syringes and other drug paraphernalia — part of a haul of more than 500 needles across four campsites that city officials said were collected under the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway.

He also displayed a brochure that will be handed out to people on the streets and subways that shows a tidy bed and a sparkling bathroom beneath the words, “Do you need a place to sleep tonight?”

While it is difficult to accurately count the number of people living unsheltered, the city’s most recent estimate, conducted in January 2021, tallied about 1,300 people sleeping in subways and about 1,100 on the streets. Many advocates consider the estimate to be an undercount.

The vast majority of the city’s approximately 50,000 homeless people live in shelters — about 30,000 in family shelters, and about 18,000 in shelters for single adults.

Transit officials have stressed that the subway is not intended for public shelter and have said that the number of people seeking refuge there raises concerns among some riders and interferes with daily operations.

At a news conference on Wednesday, Janno Lieber, the chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which runs the subway system, commended the steps being taken to steer homeless people off trains. But he also acknowledged that some of those being referred to services were likely to return to public transit.

	<p>“There will be some folks who, God willing, get out of the situation they’re in in a permanent way, and being realistic, there will be others that don’t,” Mr. Lieber said. “It’s just too early to say what those percentages are and whether we’re actually making a dent in this situation.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 States close test, vax sites; uptick looms?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/us/covid-vaccine-testing-states.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/us/covid-vaccine-testing-states.html</a>
GIST	<p>CHICAGO — As Americans shed masks and return to offices and restaurants, local and state officials are scaling back the most visible public health efforts to address the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>States like Illinois are shuttering free COVID-19 testing sites after nearly two years of operation. Arizona, Nevada, Hawaii and Ohio have stopped releasing daily data on virus hospitalizations, infections and deaths. And, perhaps most notably, some places are diminishing their campaigns to vaccinate residents even as federal authorities announced Tuesday that people 50 and older could get a second booster shot.</p> <p>The slowing of state and local efforts comes as the virus in the United States appears, at least for now, to be in retreat, with cases falling swiftly in recent weeks.</p> <p>But the cutbacks also arrive at a moment when a more transmissible version of the omicron variant of the coronavirus, known as BA.2, is spreading through Europe, Asia and is now the dominant version of new virus cases in the United States. New coronavirus infections are edging upward once again in several states.</p> <p>And Americans are still lagging behind many other countries in vaccination. Only about 65% of Americans have received initial shots, and less than one-third of Americans have had a first booster shot.</p> <p>If another surge in the pandemic is ahead, public health officials said, it could be a challenge to quickly ramp up the vaccination and testing sites and other measures that are now being shut down.</p> <p>“We have to be cautious in how we move forward,” said Dr. Ben Weston, chief health policy adviser for Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, where he has kept vaccine clinics open. “Imagine that we’re a boat at sea and we just got off the largest tidal wave we’ve ever been on. It would be a strange time to throw out the life jackets.”</p> <p>Some health officials said that they were merely shifting their efforts in the face of dwindling demand for both COVID tests and vaccines, with fewer than 225,000 shots administered across the country each day.</p> <p>Dr. Allison Arwady, Chicago’s top health official, said that two popular vaccination initiatives — a \$50 gift card incentive and a program to vaccinate Chicagoans in their homes any day of the week — would be pared down in April.</p> <p>“It’s definitely the time to be pulling back on some resources,” Arwady said.</p> <p>Demand for vaccines has waned, she explained, and she is trying to save money as she anticipates cuts in federal funding because of an impasse in Washington, D.C., over COVID spending.</p> <p>In San Antonio, with a majority of residents already immunized and case numbers at a low, demand for vaccines at the mass site outside the city’s Alamodome has dropped, said Miguel Cervantes, the city’s public health administrator. The site closed Friday after 15 months of continuous operation and more than 200,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses. At its peak, it administered roughly 3,500 vaccinations a day. Last week, it averaged fewer than 50.</p> <p>“We haven’t seen the numbers to support a need for a site,” Cervantes said.</p>

The high price of maintaining the site's staffing and equipment is a less cost-effective use of those resources than smaller, community-based events, he added. And with the 64,000-seat Alamodome stadium now hosting a full slate of sports and concerts, the parking lot has returned to its pre-pandemic use.

"If people aren't walking in the door, it burns a lot of cash to have a fully staffed testing center," said Andrew Noymer, a public health professor at the University of California, Irvine. "So I can understand why states and localities are closing them. We're going to have to find a way to be flexible."

Federal dollars for the COVID pandemic have been dwindling in recent days, as a fund designated to reimburse tests and treatment for the uninsured is no longer accepting claims. State and local officials, alarmed by debates in Washington over the future of COVID funding, have anticipated that they will face tighter budgets in the near future if federal funds are cut.

Targeted, community-based events are more effective at reaching those who remain unvaccinated, said Dr. Desmar Walkes, medical director for the city of Austin, Texas, which has shut down all but one of its mass vaccination sites.

"We're at that point where the one-on-one conversations and having the ability to have community partners go in and educate on the safety of vaccine and answer questions is giving us a little better acceptance," Walkes said.

Her department is seeing a higher rate of uptake through mobile clinics at long-term care facilities, schools, workplaces, and even soccer games than at mass vaccination sites, she said.

If demand for vaccines, testing and treatment increases amid a looming wave of the BA.2 subvariant, health officials say, they can easily restart these programs. It would take just a few days to do so in Austin, Walkes said.

But some experts expressed doubt that resuming operations at testing and treatment sites could happen as quickly as needed in the event of a surge.

Adriane Casalotti, the chief of government and public affairs for the National Association of County and City Health Officials, said that during lulls when cases are low, health departments could be taking the time to plan and prepare for what is next. Shuttering larger-scale efforts like testing sites follows a certain logic — but leaves a community vulnerable.

"In a situation where you don't have long testing lines, people think, We can get rid of this testing site," she said. "That might work for this week and next week, but ramping something like that back up — if the situation changes on the ground — is really hard."

Public health experts worry that Americans have moved on from the pandemic before it is over and that the United States could be unprepared for another wave. The virus is still causing the deaths of more than 700 Americans each day.

"We're in this phase of the pandemic where we're transitioning," said Aubree Gordon, an infectious disease epidemiologist at the University of Michigan. "It's still really critical that testing is readily available — you can't know what's going on if you're not looking at it."

At the same time that vaccination and testing efforts are falling increasingly on community health centers and local clinics, these providers are seeing their funding disappear. For months, Kintegra Health, which operates health centers across central North Carolina, has relied on money from Health Resources & Services Administration. A federal program, it provides reimbursements for COVID-19 testing, treatment and vaccine administration for uninsured patients, facilitating thousands of tests and vaccinations a day, primarily in mobile clinics.

But officials said that program would stop accepting claims because of lack of funding, forcing the health center to halt its mobile clinics.

“I’m concerned about what’s next, because when I shut it down and all these people go find other jobs and the next variant comes along, will I be ready?” said Robert Spencer, chief executive of Kintegra Health.

In many states, services that local and state governments administered are shifting to traditional health care providers.

By mid-April, pharmacies and health care providers will deliver all vaccines in Vermont as the state government winds down its vaccine sites. Demand for vaccines from the state-run sites has plummeted by 77% in the past 30 days. The only providers that reported a modest uptick in vaccinations were primary-care offices.

“The reintegration back into the health care system of vaccination is really the path forward,” said Dr. Mark Levine, commissioner of the state’s Department of Health. “People aren’t going to those other sites; they’re showing drop-off. And they’re going to the health care system, where they belong and where immunization has always occurred.”

In Vermont, the state has also transitioned its state-run testing sites primarily into distribution centers for rapid at-home tests, rather than PCR tests. That means that the state has a blurrier picture of the number of COVID cases in the state, but Levine said state health officials had already moved away from focusing on case counts, relying instead on wastewater surveillance and genome sequencing to keep track of the virus.

The state still posts a report of new daily COVID cases five days a week on its website but is planning to soon follow the lead of many other states in posting a weekly report instead.

Many states have switched to weekly from daily reporting of new cases on public dashboards. Officials say that it is time-intensive to publicly update data every day and that daily variation in the data makes it less meaningful than weekly reports. Instead, some are releasing it on public dashboards only once a week, in keeping with reports on other ailments, like the flu.

In Chicago, Arwady said the city was still trying to vaccinate every Chicagoan — keeping its at-home vaccine option open four days a week instead of seven, telephoning residents who are eligible for boosters and tracing contacts in high-risk settings such as prisons and nursing homes.

Even at a time when COVID infections are low, she worries that cuts in federal funding could be detrimental in the long run and threaten the country’s ability to face future surges of the pandemic.

“I am concerned about this idea that ‘COVID’s over, we can stop funding public health,’” she said. “That will put us right back where we were.”

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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 Russia troops ‘acute radiation sickness’</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thedailybeast.com/russian-troops-suffer-acute-radiation-sickness-after-digging-chernobyl-trenches?ref=home">https://www.thedailybeast.com/russian-troops-suffer-acute-radiation-sickness-after-digging-chernobyl-trenches?ref=home</a>
GIST	<p>Several hundred <a href="#">Russian soldiers</a> were forced to hastily withdraw from the <a href="#">Chernobyl nuclear power plant</a> in Ukraine after suffering “acute radiation sickness” from contaminated soil, according to Ukrainian officials.</p> <p>The troops, who reportedly dug trenches in a contaminated Red Forest near the site of the worst nuclear disaster in history, are now being treated in a special medical facility in Gomel, Belarus. The forest is so named because thousands of pine trees turned red during the 1986 nuclear disaster. The area is considered so highly toxic that not even highly specialized Chernobyl workers are allowed to enter the zone.</p>

	<p>Local reports suggest that seven buses with the zapped troops arrived in Gomel early Thursday. Journalists on the ground have also reported “ghost buses” of dead soldiers being transported from Belarus to Russia under the cover of dark.</p> <p>U.S. intelligence reported Wednesday that Russian forces began withdrawing from the defunct site. Russia said the withdrawal from Chernobyl was part of a pledge to scale back the invasion. But Ukrainian media says it is actually because the troops were “irradiated” from the contaminated soil.</p> <p>“Another batch of Russian irradiated terrorists who seized the Chernobyl zone was brought to the Belarusian Radiation Medicine Center in Gomel today,” Yaroslav Yemelianenko, who works for the Public Council at the State Agency of Ukraine for Exclusion Zone Management, posted on Facebook. “There are rules for dealing with this territory.”</p> <p>The Chernobyl facility fell to Russian control on Feb. 24, the first day of the invasion. Workers were on duty for more than 600 hours before being allowed a shift change. International concern grew immediately when Russian troops moved heavy military hardware through the area, kicking up radioactive dust without any protective equipment. Forest fires in the area also raised concern about environmental contamination.</p> <p>Digging trenches in the forest—considered the most contaminated area of the site—drew widespread ridicule from Ukrainians who work at the site.</p> <p>The debacle is the latest in a series of missteps by the <a href="#">Russian troops struggling to keep their footing in their increasingly failed war</a>.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 Ukraine president: defense at ‘turning point’</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukrainian-president-defense-turning-point-83777385">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukrainian-president-defense-turning-point-83777385</a>
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- Ukraine's president said his country's defense against the Russian invasion was at a “turning point” and again pressed the United States for more help, hours after the Kremlin's forces reneged on a pledge to scale back some of their operations.</p> <p>Russian bombardment of areas around Kyiv and the northern city of Chernihiv and intensified attacks elsewhere in the country further undermined hopes for progress toward ending the bloody conflict that has devolved into a war of attrition. Civilians trapped in besieged cities have shouldered some of the worst suffering, though both sides said Thursday they would attempt another evacuation from the port city of Mariupol.</p> <p>Talks between Ukraine and Russia were set to resume Friday by video, according to the head of the Ukrainian delegation, David Arakhamia.</p> <p>A delegation of Ukrainian lawmakers visited Washington on Wednesday to push for more U.S. assistance, saying their nation needs more military equipment, more financial help and tougher sanctions against Russia.</p> <p>“We need to kick Russian soldiers off our land, and for that we need all, all possible weapons,” Ukrainian parliament member Anastasia Radina said at a news conference at the Ukrainian Embassy.</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made the case directly to U.S. President Joe Biden.</p> <p>“If we really are fighting for freedom and in defense of democracy together, then we have a right to demand help in this difficult turning point. Tanks, aircraft, artillery systems. Freedom should be armed no worse than tyranny,” Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address to the nation, which he delivered standing in the dark outside the dimly lit presidential offices in Kyiv. He thanked the U.S. for an additional \$500 million in aid that was announced Wednesday.</p>

There seemed little faith that Russia and Ukraine will resolve the conflict soon, particularly after the Russian military's about-face and its most recent attacks.

Russia said Tuesday that it would de-escalate operations near Kyiv and Chernihiv to "increase mutual trust and create conditions for further negotiations." Zelenskyy and the West were skeptical. Soon after, Ukrainian officials reported that Russian shelling was hitting homes, stores, libraries and other civilian sites in or near those areas.

Britain's Defense Ministry also confirmed "significant Russian shelling and missile strikes" around Chernihiv.

It said Thursday that "Russian forces continue to hold positions to the east and west of Kyiv despite the withdrawal of a limited number of units. Heavy fighting will likely take place in the suburbs of the city in coming days."

Russian troops also stepped up their attacks on the Donbas region in the east and around the city of Izyum, which lies on a key route to the Donbas, after redeploying units from other areas, the Ukrainian side said.

Olexander Lomako, secretary of the Chernihiv city council, said the Russian announcement turned out to be "a complete lie."

"At night they didn't decrease, but vice versa increased the intensity of military action," Lomako said.

A top British intelligence official said Thursday that demoralized Russian soldiers in Ukraine were refusing to carry out orders and sabotaging their own equipment and had accidentally shot down their own aircraft.

In a speech in the Australian capital Canberra, Jeremy Fleming, who heads the GCHQ electronic spy agency, said President Vladimir Putin had apparently "massively misjudged" the invasion, he said. Although Putin's advisers appeared to be too afraid to tell the truth, the "extent of these misjudgments must be crystal clear to the regime," he said.

U.S. intelligence officials have given similar assessments that Putin is being misinformed by advisers too scared to give honest evaluations.

Five weeks into the invasion that has left thousands dead, the number of Ukrainians fleeing the country topped a staggering 4 million, half of them children, according to the United Nations.

"I do not know if we can still believe the Russians," Nikolay Nazarov, a refugee from Ukraine, said as he pushed his father's wheelchair at a border crossing into Poland. "I think more escalation will occur in eastern Ukraine. That is why we cannot go back to Kharkiv."

Zelenskyy said the continuing negotiations with Russia were only "words without specifics." He said Ukraine was preparing for concentrated new strikes on the Donbas.

Zelenskyy also said he had recalled Ukraine's ambassadors to Georgia and Morocco, suggesting they had not done enough to persuade those countries to support Ukraine and punish Russia for the invasion.

"With all due respect, if there won't be weapons, won't be sanctions, won't be restrictions for Russian business, then please look for other work," he said.

During talks Tuesday in Istanbul, the faint outlines of a possible peace agreement seemed to emerge when the Ukrainian delegation offered a framework under which the country would declare itself neutral — dropping its bid to join NATO, as Moscow has long demanded — in return for security guarantees from a group of other nations.

Top Russian officials responded positively, with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov saying Wednesday that Ukraine's willingness to accept neutrality and look outside NATO for security represents "significant progress," according to Russian news agencies.

But those statements were followed by attacks.

Oleksandr Pavliuk, head of the Kyiv region military administration, said Russian shells targeted residential areas and civilian infrastructure in the Bucha, Brovary and Vyshhorod regions around the capital.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said the military also targeted fuel depots in two towns in central Ukraine with air-launched long-range cruise missiles. Russian forces hit a Ukrainian special forces headquarters in the southern Mykolaiv region, he said, and two ammunition depots in the Donetsk region, in the Donbas.

In southern Ukraine, a Russian missile destroyed a fuel depot in Dnipro, the country's fourth-largest city, regional officials said.

The U.S. said Russia had begun to reposition less than 20% of its troops that had been arrayed around Kyiv. Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said troops from there and some other zones began moving mostly to the north, and some went into neighboring Belarus. Kirby said it appeared Russia planned to resupply them and send them back into Ukraine, but it is not clear where.

The Ukrainian military said some Russian airborne units were believed to have withdrawn into Belarus.

Top Russian military officials say their main goal now is the "liberation" of the Donbas, the predominantly Russian-speaking industrial heartland where Moscow-backed separatists have been battling Ukrainian forces since 2014. Some analysts have suggested that the focus on the Donbas and the pledge to de-escalate may merely be an effort to put a positive spin on reality since Moscow's ground forces have become bogged down and taken heavy losses.

The Russians also are expected to try to blockade Chernihiv.

Russian forces have already been blockading Mariupol, a key port in the south, for weeks. The city has seen some of the worst devastation of the war and many attempts to implement safe evacuation corridors have collapsed. Ukraine accused Russian forces last week of seizing bus drivers and rescue workers headed to Mariupol.

The Russian military said it committed to a localized cease-fire along the route from Mariupol to the Ukrainian-held city of Zaporizhzhia from Thursday morning.

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said that Ukraine was sending out 45 buses to collect people. She said the International Committee of the Red Cross was acting as an intermediary.

Similar evacuation efforts have been planned before and collapsed amid recriminations over fighting along the route.

Civilians who have managed to leave the city have typically done so using private cars, but the number of drivable vehicles left in Mariupol has dwindled and fuel stocks are low.

Russia has also operated its own evacuations from territory it has captured in Mariupol. Ukraine alleges Russia is sending its citizens to "filtration camps" in separatist-controlled eastern Ukraine and then forcibly taking people to Russia.

The U.N. is looking into those allegations.



HEADLINE	<b>03/31 China strongly backs Afghanistan</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/chinas-xi-strongly-backs-afghanistan-regional-conference-83778046">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/chinas-xi-strongly-backs-afghanistan-regional-conference-83778046</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Thursday issued strong backing for Afghanistan at a regional conference, while making no mention of human rights abuses by the country's Taliban leaders.</p> <p>Xi pledged China's support in a message to a gathering of representatives from Afghanistan, China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in a central Chinese city that spotlights Beijing's aspirations to play a leading role in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of U.S. forces last August.</p> <p>A "peaceful, stable, developed and prosperous Afghanistan" is what Afghans aspire to, which "serves the common interests of regional countries and the international community," Xi said.</p> <p>"China has all along respected Afghanistan's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and is committed to supporting Afghanistan's peaceful and stable development," Xi said in his message to the gathering in Tunxi, a center of the tourism industry in Anhui province.</p> <p>Xi gave no specifics, although China has already shipped emergency aid to Afghanistan and is seeking to develop copper mining there.</p> <p>China follows what it calls a strict policy of "non-intervention" in other countries' internal affairs, including opposing those staged for humanitarian purposes unless sanctioned by the United Nations. Despite that, Beijing is frequently accused of meddling to further its own domestic and international interests.</p> <p>Special envoys for Afghanistan from China, the United States and Russia, a group known as the "Extended Troika," were also meeting concurrently in Tunxi.</p> <p>Although it has yet to recognize the Taliban government, China has moved quickly to shore up its ties with the radical Islamic group.</p> <p>A month before the Taliban took power, Foreign Minister Wang Yi hosted a high-powered delegation from the group for a July 28, 2021, meeting in the Chinese port city of Tianjin. Wang referred to the group as "pivotal" force important to peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan.</p> <p>On that and other occasions, Chinese have pushed the Taliban for assurances they will not permit operations within Afghanistan's borders by members of China's Turkic Muslim Uyghur minority intent on overthrowing Chinese rule in their native region of Xinjiang.</p> <p>Wang also made a surprise stop in Kabul last week to meet Taliban leaders, even as the international community fumed over the hard-line movement's broken promise a day earlier to open schools to girls beyond the sixth grade.</p> <p>China has studiously avoided mentioning the limits on girls' education and other human rights abuses, particularly those targeting women, while keeping its Kabul embassy open.</p> <p>The foreign ministers of Qatar and Indonesia have been invited to the meeting of neighboring states as guests. Taliban-appointed foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, is representing Afghanistan at the meeting.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 UK: Putin 'massively misjudged' invasion</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/live-updates/russia-ukraine/?id=83390885">https://abcnews.go.com/International/live-updates/russia-ukraine/?id=83390885</a>

GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin has apparently "massively misjudged" his invasion of Ukraine, a U.K. intelligence chief said Thursday.</p> <p>"It's clear he misjudged the resistance of the Ukrainian people. He underestimated the strength of the coalition his actions would galvanize. He underplayed the economic consequences of the sanctions regime, and he overestimated the abilities of his military to secure a rapid victory," Jeremy Fleming, head of the U.K. Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), said during a speech in Australia's capital, Canberra.</p> <p>"We've seen Russian soldiers, short of weapons and morale, refusing to carry out orders, sabotaging their own equipment and even accidentally shooting down their own aircraft," he added.</p> <p>While Fleming agreed with <a href="#">a recent assessment by U.S. intelligence</a> that Putin's advisers were believed to be too afraid to tell the truth, he said the "extent of these misjudgments must be crystal clear to the regime." He warned that Russia is searching for cyber targets and bringing in mercenaries to reinforce its stalled military campaign in Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Europeans expel dozens Russia envoys</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-czech-republic-netherlands-europe-espionage-ecf8770a23a6a3997d32fc07fef4ad80">https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-czech-republic-netherlands-europe-espionage-ecf8770a23a6a3997d32fc07fef4ad80</a>
GIST	<p>THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — In what appeared to be a coordinated action to tackle Russian espionage, at least four European allies expelled dozens of Russian diplomats on Tuesday.</p> <p>The expulsions come as relations between Russia and the West have plunged into a deep freeze following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The Netherlands said it was expelling 17 Russians who it described as intelligence officers masquerading as diplomats. Belgium said it was ejecting 21 Russians. The Czech Republic gave one Russian diplomat 72 hours to leave the country. Ireland told four senior Russian officials to leave the country because of activities deemed not "in accordance with international standards of diplomatic behaviour."</p> <p>North Macedonia announced late Monday it is expelling five Russian diplomats for "activities contrary to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations."</p> <p>"Together with our allies, we are reducing the Russian intelligence presence in the EU," the Czech Foreign Ministry said.</p> <p>Poland last week expelled 45 Russians whom the government identified as intelligence officers using their diplomatic status as cover to operate in the country.</p> <p>The Netherlands said it took its decision in consultation with "a number of like-minded countries," citing similar expulsions by the United States, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Montenegro.</p> <p>"The cabinet has decided to do this because of the threat to national security posed by this group," the Dutch ministry said in a statement. "The intelligence threat against the Netherlands remains high. The current attitude of Russia in a broader sense makes the presence of these intelligence officers undesirable. The deportation is a measure taken in the context of national security."</p> <p>Dutch Foreign Minister Wopke Hoekstra said he was prepared for a retaliation from Moscow.</p> <p>"Experience shows that Russia does not leave these kinds of measures unanswered," he said. "We cannot speculate about that, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is prepared for various scenarios that may arise in the near future."</p>

	<p>That was demonstrated earlier Tuesday, when Russia said it expelled a total of 10 diplomats from the three Baltic EU states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in retaliation for those countries expelling Russian diplomats earlier this month.</p> <p>The Russian Foreign Ministry said it was cancelling the accreditation of four Lithuanian diplomats, three Latvians and three Estonians and they would be required to leave the country. That corresponds to the number of Russian diplomats each country previously expelled.</p> <p>On March 18, the three Baltic countries ordered the expulsion of 10 Russian embassy staff members in a coordinated action taken in solidarity with Ukraine.</p> <p>Moscow called that move “provocative and entirely baseless” and that it had summoned the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian ambassadors in Moscow for an official protest.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Seattle Indigenous Peoples Day, Juneteenth</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-finalizes-indigenous-peoples-day-juneteenth-as-city-holidays/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-finalizes-indigenous-peoples-day-juneteenth-as-city-holidays/</a>
GIST	<p>The Seattle City Council voted 7-0 on Tuesday to solidify Indigenous Peoples Day and Juneteenth as city holidays beginning this year, approving several actions formalizing council efforts that started in December.</p> <p>Tuesday’s bill expanded recent efforts to establish Indigenous Peoples Day as a legal holiday for more city employees and as a parking holiday. It also authorized memorandums of understanding with multiple labor unions recognizing both holidays.</p> <p>“Although the city has already established Indigenous Peoples Day as a day of observance and legal holiday for city employees represented by the Coalition [of City Unions], legislation is required to expand this holiday to unrepresented city employees and establish a parking holiday,” said Council President Debora Juarez, who sponsored the legislation and is <a href="#">the first Indigenous president of the council</a>.</p> <p>In the 1970s, The International Conference on Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations in the Americas began to advocate for a celebration of Native Americans on what was then — and is still in some areas — celebrated as Columbus Day. Since then, Indigenous Peoples Day has been observed on the second Monday of October.</p> <p>In 2014, the council passed a resolution — co-sponsored by Councilmember Kshama Sawant and now-Mayor Bruce Harrell “encouraging other institutions to recognize the Day; and reaffirming the city’s commitment to promote the well-being and growth of Seattle’s American Indian and Indigenous community.” The action, however, did not establish a holiday. In 2021, <a href="#">President Joe Biden was the first U.S. president to recognize the holiday federally</a>.</p> <p>In December 2021, the council adopted <a href="#">an ordinance establishing Juneteenth as a legal holiday</a> for unrepresented city employees and a parking holiday for the public. In a separate ordinance, the council authorized a memorandum of understanding between the city and the Coalition of City Unions, making both Juneteenth and Indigenous Peoples Day legal holidays for represented city employees.</p> <p>Juneteenth celebrates the emancipation of enslaved people in Texas, on June 19, 1865, two and half years after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued. June 19 has since been celebrated in Black communities as Freedom Day, Jubilee Day, Liberation Day, Emancipation Day and Black Independence Day, and most commonly Juneteenth.</p> <p>Governments have only begun to formally recognize the holiday in recent years, with both <a href="#">Washington state</a> establishing a statewide holiday and <a href="#">Biden establishing a federal holiday in 2021</a>.</p>

	<p>“I think it’s important that our country acknowledges slavery this holiday,” Councilmember Tammy Morales, who sponsored the original Juneteenth legislation said in December. “As we recognize it as a city, it also allows us to recognize the legacy of trauma for Black Americans, and to demonstrate an understanding of the need to actively pursue an anti-racist society.”</p> <p>With Tuesday’s vote, council central staff says about 90% of city employees have both days as paid holidays. A staff spokesperson could not share details on the employees not included, noting that any potentially ongoing labor negotiations are confidential.</p> <p>Several city labor organizations have agreements adopting the holidays for members, including the Seattle Police Officers Guild, IBEW 77 and Fire Chiefs Local 2898 who were added through Tuesday’s vote.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 King Co. population shrinks; 1<sup>st</sup> time 50yrs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/king-county-lost-population-last-year-for-the-first-time-in-almost-50-years/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/king-county-lost-population-last-year-for-the-first-time-in-almost-50-years/</a>
GIST	<p>I wasn’t in the Seattle area in the early 1970s, during the infamous “Boeing Bust.” But those who were remember it as a grim time. The aerospace giant, the largest employer in the region at the time, teetered on bankruptcy and laid off more than half its workforce.</p> <p>Seattle was so down and out that a couple real estate agents put up a billboard in SeaTac reading, “Will the last person leaving Seattle — turn out the lights.”</p> <p>The reason I bring up this painful chapter in local history?</p> <p>That’s how far back I had to go in U.S. Census archives to find the last time that King County had a one-year drop in population — from 1971 to 1972, the county lost about 11,000 residents.</p> <p>New census data shows that last year, it happened again.</p> <p>Between July 1, 2020, and July 1, 2021, King County’s population dropped by around 20,000, or 0.9%. The population estimate for 2021 is about 2.25 million.</p> <p>Not a huge decline, to be sure — but it’s still notable when you consider the county’s 49-year run of population growth. And in recent years, King County didn’t just grow modestly — it was among the <a href="#">fastest-growing large U.S. counties</a>, gaining 320,000 people from 2010 to 2019.</p> <p>In the last one-year period before the pandemic changed everything, from July 1, 2018, to July 1, 2019, King County had a net population growth of about 24,400.</p> <p>Needless to say, the pandemic is to blame for the decline last year, at least in part. Let’s take a look at the components of change to see what happened.</p> <p>There are two ways that population can grow: migration (domestic and international) and “natural increase,” which is births minus deaths.</p> <p>The pandemic, of course, greatly curtailed the movement of people between countries, which had a dramatic effect on international immigration. This hit King County particularly hard because international migration was the primary driver of growth in the previous decade.</p> <p>In the 2018 to 2019 period, the county gained about 18,000 people through international migration. Last year, that number fell to just under 6,000. It’s still an increase, but paltry compared with the previous decade.</p>

Domestic migration — that is, people moving here from other counties in the U.S. — fell even more. In fact, domestic migration had already started to trail off by end of the previous decade. In the 2018-19 period, the number of people who left King County exceeded the number who moved here from within the U.S. by close to 5,000.

But last year, the population loss to other counties was dramatically larger. King County had a net loss of nearly 33,000 people from domestic migration. If you want to know the primary reason our population declined, look no further.

It seems likely that the pandemic played a role here, too. The rise of remote work made it possible for many people who work in the county to live elsewhere. The ever-rising cost of housing in King County couldn't have helped matters either.

The Census Bureau only provides a net figure for population loss. It doesn't give us the components behind that number — in other words, how many people moved into King County versus how many left. We also don't know from this data how much of the county's population loss came from the city of Seattle versus the surrounding areas.

Another thing the data doesn't tell us, unfortunately, is where all the folks who left King County went. But typically, Pierce and Snohomish counties are the two biggest net gainers from King. (Incidentally, both Pierce and Snohomish counties had modest population gains from 2020 to 2021.)

Finally, there is natural increase, and compared with a "normal" year, deaths were higher and births were lower. There was still a net increase, but it was only a gain of less than 7,000. In the 2018 to 2019 period, the natural increase was about 12,500.

The higher number of deaths (there were around 16,500) is surely due, at least in part, to COVID-19. Even the lower number of births (about 23,000) could be related to the pandemic — nationally, there was a "baby bust," which public health officials have linked to the pandemic.

Add up all these components of change and get the 20,000-person deficit.

King was one of many large U.S. counties to shrink last year. Among the 15 most-populous counties, 10 had a net loss of residents. Kings County, New York — better known as Brooklyn — shrank by more than 3%, the largest decline among the top 15 counties.

Many of the areas that experienced strong growth are in the Sunbelt. Maricopa County, Arizona, where Phoenix is located, had the largest numeric population increase of any county, at about 58,000.

The million-dollar question is whether this population decline represents a pandemic-era blip — or is it the start of trend? For that answer, we'll simply have to wait and see.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 King Co. health officials: Covid cases rising</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/rising-covid-cases-in-king-county-doh-briefing/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/rising-covid-cases-in-king-county-doh-briefing/</a>
GIST	<p>COVID-19 infections are again on the rise in King County as omicron's infectious subvariant, BA.2, continues to spread throughout Washington state — but there's no cause for alarm yet, according to the county's top health officer.</p> <p>The county's COVID trends have stayed fairly consistent for the past couple months, after the surge of the omicron variant peaked in early to mid-January. Dr. Jeff Duchin, King County's health officer, said this week that virus levels were plateauing up until last week.</p> <p>"There has been a clear change in the trend direction in King County," Duchin said in an interview. "For the first time in awhile now, we're seeing small but measurable increases in cases and hospitalizations."</p>

Over the past week, the county saw a 33% increase in infections, from 170 to 230 daily cases, and a 35% increase in hospitalizations, from three to four daily hospitalizations, Public Health — Seattle & King County spokesperson Gabriel Spitzer said Tuesday.

During the height of the region's rise in omicron cases, the county was reporting more than 6,600 daily cases and 60 daily hospitalizations.

COVID deaths, meanwhile, are down about 36% — steadily declining for the past month. Spitzer added that the county's hospital capacity has recently increased while COVID numbers were falling, "lessening the impact on the health care system."

The county's public health teams are paying "serious attention" to the slight increase, but residents shouldn't panic at this point, Duchin said.

"I really do want to emphasize 'small (increases),' because these numbers are still lower than they've been since the delta surge," he said. "... We've known that future surges of unpredicted severity and duration are to be expected."

According to UW Medicine's virology lab, the largest genomic sequencing lab in the state that's been tracking COVID levels since the beginning of the pandemic, the region is seeing BA.2 in about half of COVID samples recently sequenced, said Pavitra Roychoudhury, acting instructor at the University of Washington's Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology.

She noted the levels are fairly consistent with national estimates for the United States.

"Since BA.2 is more transmissible than BA.1, we'd expect it to replace BA.1 eventually," Roychoudhury wrote in an email.

While it's too soon to tell what the significance of recent increases will be, Duchin encouraged the public to continue paying close attention to the [county's COVID trends](#) and keep certain mitigation strategies in mind, including getting vaccinated and boosted.

Also important, he said, are improving indoor air quality, wearing high-quality face masks for people at increased risk of COVID, and testing and isolating if symptoms arise.

"This recent change ... is cause for awareness and people need to be reminded that COVID-19 is still with us and still poses a risk to vulnerable people," he said. "It's unlikely we'll see a surge as bad as the recent omicron surge, but it's really impossible to predict."

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Report: police hiring bonus mixed results</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattle-continues-lose-police-new-report-finds-mixed-results-hiring-bonus-program/LK7DOODWPZG5JGJQZIWCRWUAQ/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattle-continues-lose-police-new-report-finds-mixed-results-hiring-bonus-program/LK7DOODWPZG5JGJQZIWCRWUAQ/</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The Seattle City Council is gearing up for another debate on one of the linchpins issues of public safety: how to stabilize the Seattle Police Department's staffing levels and whether hiring bonuses should play a role therein.</p> <p>Last week, interim Seattle Police Chief Adrian Diaz reported that Seattle police continue to lose more officers than its gaining: the SPD has only been able to bring on seven officers since January, whereas 34 have left.</p> <p>Last year, former Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan handed down an order that authorized Seattle police to spend on lateral and new hire bonuses.</p>



In recent weeks, the council has signaled its interest in bringing back the program. While the legislation in question does not design the program — and therefore does not stipulate exact dollars amounts — it would authorize the council to leverage its existing budget to field new and lateral police recruits.

Preempting a vote on the legislation, Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda requested that the Council Budget Office report on the success of the bonus program from last year.

The [report](#) covers multiple city departments that have used hiring bonuses as a recruitment strategy. Concerning the SPD, it concludes that the department “did not experience an increase in hiring since implementing a hiring incentive into their process in October 2021.” That finding is presented alongside several caveats, among them that the SPD did experience an increase in the number of applicants, although they ultimately did not materialize into hires.

“To me, what is important is looking at the increased interest, as reflected in application, in signing up for tests, actually taking the test, going through every single step of the hiring process,” Councilmember Sara Nelson, the sponsor of the renewed hiring incentive push, told MyNorthwest.

For specifics, the councilmember pointed to Diaz’s recent public safety presentation: SPD saw 17 applicants in January. However, only one— a lateral hire— matriculated.

Summary findings of the budget report offer that the timeframe of the study— Durkan [issued](#) the order in October of last year, and it effectively continued through January— is such that “there is not enough conclusive data to determine if hiring bonuses were successful in increasing hiring and further exploration would be required.”

“I do not think that the memo that came out of the budget office is an indication of the need for a staffing incentive program. We have an understaffed police department. Crime is going up. We have to accelerate the hiring of new officers,” Nelson offered.

Nelson affirms that the limited timeframe of the audit is the reason its results do not bear out a positive relationship between cutting checks for officers and adding more recruits to the SPD.

“I would argue that the number of hires is not a meaningful metric for evaluating the incentive’s effectiveness,” Nelson wrote in an internal memo to the council.

“SPD’s hiring process is a minimum of six months long and includes an initial screening just to apply, a written test, psychological and physical assessments, a background check, and an oral exam (the “Oral Board”) and multiple interviews.”

“It is cyclical, with defined application periods and limited testing dates. So by my logic, it would have been impossible for SPD to have hired anyone who applied during implementation between October 29th, 2021 and the beginning of January 2022.”

Last week, Mayor Bruce Harrell offered the following consideration of the bonus program as a recruitment tool:

“Incentive bonuses have come up. I’m not fully convinced that is the enticer,” Harrell [told KIRO Newsradio](#).

“It might be,” he added. “What we’re looking at is talking to the officers themselves and talking to public safety advocates ... What we’re looking at is a comprehensive package that we’ll develop before the budget.”

The council’s 2022 budget appropriates funds for 125 new hires. Nelson is skeptical that the SPD will meet that quota, and, therefore, views the incentives as an intuitive next step to subsidize the cost of living in Seattle for prospective officers as the SPD attempts to compete for hires with other local departments. She also notes that its approval would represent a symbolic gesture of good faith that Seattle’s culture welcomes police.



“A hiring incentive program is a form of a signal that we are welcoming, we will appreciate you coming here, and working for the people of Seattle,” she explained. “Seattle’s an expensive city in which to live. It’s not just getting a check when one signs the dotted line that will make all the difference. It’s not everything, but we can use every tool in our toolbox. This is one of them.”

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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 School discipline changes stir controversy</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/school-discipline-changes-stir-up-controversy-worry-lakewood/WJVP3B6YAVHCZCXPQO3MLO3JA/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/school-discipline-changes-stir-up-controversy-worry-lakewood/WJVP3B6YAVHCZCXPQO3MLO3JA/</a>
GIST	<p>LAKEWOOD, Wash. — Changes to how schools in Washington State punish kids is causing controversy in the South Sound. It’s a state-wide change that’s been in the works for years, but recently made official at Clover Park School District in Lakewood.</p> <p>The changes have some parents and school board members worried kids won’t be treated fairly.</p> <p>But the school district says <a href="#">its discipline policy</a> aims to achieve exactly the opposite – making sure kids are not only treated as fairly as possible while helping address the root of the problem, but also in a way that lines up with state law.</p> <p>“I really liked how it’s geared towards helping the student – you can’t treat every scenario the same, right?” said Anthony Veliz, a Clover Park School District board member. The school board voted 3-2 on <a href="#">March 14</a> to adopt the new discipline policy language.</p> <p>The changes ensure the district meets legally required state standards for discipline. In 2016, the state legislature found schools across Washington State were disproportionately punishing students of color and special needs students, specifically with what’s called “exclusionary discipline” – consequences like suspensions that pull a kid out of class.</p> <p>“That’s nothing new to be honest,” said Brittney Jones, a Clover Park High School student.</p> <p>Lawmakers passed a bill (<a href="#">HB 1541</a>) in 2016 to make sure schools look for other ways to punish kids that do not impact learning, and to have staff work with families and consider culture.</p> <p>“Honestly I feel like they should at least switch it up a little, because every time we’re getting pulled out of class, we’re missing something,” said Antavious Hensley, another Clover Park High School student.</p> <p>The changes have been slowly rolling out at school districts statewide for years, with more guidance coming out in 2019 and 2021 from different state organizations like WSSDA and OSPI.</p> <p>The Clover Park School District said they had already made the changes, but this latest school board meeting clarified the language to say discipline would be “culturally responsive” and ensure that district policies were in line with state law. (The previous discipline language at Clover Park from 2019 called it “responsive to cultural context.”)</p> <p>The change raised concerns among some school board members during their March 14 meeting.</p> <p>“If it’s and myself and Mr. Veliz, do I have to look at his nationality, where he was born?” asked Paul Wagemann, another Clover Park School board member. “To be fair, if we both did the same thing, we should get the same consequence, the way I see it,” he said.</p> <p>Since the meeting, parents have been commenting on the Clover Park School District’s public <a href="#">Facebook page</a>, with many parents believing the change would lead to harsher punishments for White students. One parent wrote, “It would likely offer harsher punishments to white students, even if the conduct is identical to that of a Black or Hispanic student.”</p>

The school district says that interpretation is not correct. In a statement, the district said: “There have been media stories and social media discussions about Clover Park School District filled with inaccurate and incomplete information... The policy does not make race the determining factor for administering discipline.”

The school district added that school boards across the state, including nearby districts, have also adopted policies to be in line with state law.

The Clover Park school district’s community relations director, Leanna Albrecht, gave an example on how culturally responsive discipline would work.

“A third of our students are military connected,” Albrecht said in an email. “Sometimes a student may experience trauma or other challenges when a parent is deployed which can surface in a variety of ways (behavior being one of them). With culturally responsive discipline, the teacher will proactively work with the family to get a better understanding, provide supports and address issues before they become bigger and require exclusionary discipline,” she said.

A group called the Washington State School Directors’ Association (WSSDA) [released a model policy](#) for school districts to use in early 2021. The director of policy and legal services at WSSA, Abigail Westbrook, says treating students differently based on race would be illegal.

“I don’t know why it’s being interpreting it that way, on its face it says something else,” Westbrook said over the phone. “It would be against the law itself to use this policy as a means of disciplining a student who is White more harshly than a student of color,” Westbrook said.

She said the 2021 model included some refining to make the policy easier to understand and offer more resources, but still didn’t substantially change any discipline policy.

“So the laws have been around for a long time. And sometimes it’s hard to understand why the pushback when. But there has been no substantiative change here for several years,” Westbrook said. Clover Park HS students say the controversy feels unnecessary.

“They shouldn’t make it a race thing, because everybody’s child gets in trouble at some point – it’s unavoidable,” Hensley said.

WSSDA said it didn’t have data on how many of Washington’s 295 school districts are now compliant with state law, but estimated by now most would have already made the change.

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HEADLINE	03/29 Ukraine refugees arriving in western WA
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/everett/ukrainian-refugees-arrive-western-washington/281-9b540522-9384-4ee7-ba41-17ec417bd579">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/everett/ukrainian-refugees-arrive-western-washington/281-9b540522-9384-4ee7-ba41-17ec417bd579</a>
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash. — They are strangers in a strange land.</p> <p>Vitalii Ktitorov, his wife Nataliia, and their children Poliina and Sofiia escaped war-torn Ukraine and relocated to Everett to live with Nataliia's father. In total, there are 11 people crammed into a 2 bedroom apartment.</p> <p>Everything the family owns now fits in two small bags.</p> <p>"I can't believe what's going on," said Vitalii through an interpreter. "Even when I saw the bombing I still couldn't believe it."</p>

Vitalii keeps video and photos on his phone that shows the devastation in his hometown. The destruction is immense. One photo shows an unexploded Russian bomb that landed in a children's playground.

Natalia worries about the impact it's having on her girls, ages 4 and 2.

"They're scared of loud noises because of the bombing," she said. "They're asking questions like: Why did we leave our house? Why did we leave our toys?"

It took the family more than a week to get to America. They had to cross through seven different countries and ultimately entered the United States through Mexico.

They're now preparing to build a new life.

Vitalii was a taxi driver in Ukraine.

"We are hard-working people," he said. "We want to work so we can try to have a normal life."

The family will seek asylum, register their children for school, and begin to learn English.

First, they will need the basics, such as permanent housing.

Van Dinh-Kuno runs Refugee and Immigrant Services Northwest. She said the state is waiting on about \$28 million in federal refugee aid. That money is desperately needed, she said.

"Because our clients can't wait," she said. "We can't put them on the streets or in a homeless shelter. We don't want to traumatize them again."

Dinh-Kuno expects 2,000 to 3,000 Ukrainian refugees to arrive in Washington state over the coming weeks.

As the Ktitorov family begins to adapt to a new life in America, they can't help but worry for all those left behind. Vitalii's 61-year-old mother and Natalia's two sisters are still in the war zone.

"We want our people to have peace," Natalia said. "They are living in hell."

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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 UW: 2<sup>nd</sup> booster shot 'very marginal' benefit</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/uw-medicine-says-benefit-of-fda-approved-2nd-booster-shot-is-very-marginal">https://www.q13fox.com/news/uw-medicine-says-benefit-of-fda-approved-2nd-booster-shot-is-very-marginal</a>
GIST	<p><b>SEATTLE</b> - The U.S. Food &amp; Drug Administration (FDA) has <a href="#">authorized a second COVID-19 booster shot</a> for people ages 50 and up, but researchers at <a href="#">UW Medicine</a> believe the benefits are limited.</p> <p>This decision from the FDA still requires approval from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), but would allow immunocompromised people and anyone ages 50 and up to get a fourth shot of the vaccine, either Pfizer or Moderna. They would become eligible four months after their first booster shot.</p> <p>UW Medicine clinical virologist Dr. Anna Wald says that, for people over age 50, the benefits of another booster shot are not many.</p> <p>"I think the benefit is very marginal in that population," said Wald. "These vaccines that are currently available do not seem to prevent infection very effectively. But they do work really well, even in three doses, to prevent hospitalization and death."</p> <p>Wald is the medical director for UW Medicine's virology research clinic at Harborview, which is currently <a href="#">running two studies</a> on the efficacy of alternative COVID boosters.</p>

	"What we really need is a new approach," said Wald, "a vaccine that's different and that would provide, I think, broader and longer lasting immunity so that we would not have to be getting boosters every six months."
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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Judge rules in favor concrete workers strike</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/judge-seattle-concrete-companies-intentionally-drove-into-striking-workers-at-picket-line">https://www.q13fox.com/news/judge-seattle-concrete-companies-intentionally-drove-into-striking-workers-at-picket-line</a>
GIST	<p><b>SEATTLE</b> - A King County Superior Court Judge has <a href="#">ruled in favor of striking concrete workers</a>, who filed a lawsuit against the Seattle companies that attempted to block union members from protesting.</p> <p>According to Teamsters Local 174, <a href="#">five concrete companies</a> — Gary Merlino Construction, Stoneway Concrete, Cadman Materials, Inc., Lehigh Cement and CalPortland — assaulted striking members and/or "blocked union members' constitutional right to protest."</p> <p>A judge also found that during the strike, there have been multiple instances "at concrete company sites where non-union drivers of trucks, leasing from or serving the companies, "have '<a href="#">charged</a>' <a href="#">into picketers</a> thereby causing bodily injury and creating a significant danger to the picketers."</p> <p>The ruling stated that one truck driver "intentionally drove a truck against a picketer who was clearly standing in front of the truck," and that another driver for Cadman Materials, Inc. "drove a truck into the timed picket line, causing physical contact with picketers and causing injury."</p> <p>"It is reassuring to have the court affirm our legal right to peacefully picket, but the violence we have seen against our members is unfounded, egregious and frankly disgusting," said Brett Gallagher, <a href="#">a concrete mixer driver for CalPortland and a member of the Teamsters Local 174 Bargaining Committee</a>. "We are out here standing up for good jobs in Seattle. We deserve healthcare coverage that will keep our families safe and healthy without driving us into financial straits. We will keep calling for a contract that will ensure good jobs remain in our community for everyone working in the construction industry, and the companies know they can't keep trying to silence us through baseless legal threats."</p> <p>The court also found that the companies Cadman, Merlino and Stoneway had "failed to fully comply with an earlier order to post signage to drivers and customers alerting them of the pickets, and an order to prevent trucks from charging through picketers as they perform their timed patrolling."</p> <p>The <a href="#">ruling comes after Teamster's Local 174 reached "good faith" agreements</a> with two companies, as the concrete strike enters its fifth month.</p> <p>The offer to return to work at these companies was in good faith and does not mean a new contract agreement has been reached.</p> <p>Representatives of Teamster's Local 174, which represents around 330 workers, say Cadman's <a href="#">Seattle</a> facility and Salmon Bay Sand &amp; Gravel can use union drivers and haul concrete to projects of the companies' choosing.</p> <p>The agreement with Cadman only affects the company's Seattle plant but is not a contract.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Ukraine dismisses Russia pullback claim</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ukraine-scalng-down-skepticism/31777329.html">https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ukraine-scalng-down-skepticism/31777329.html</a>
GIST	Russia's proclaimed pullback of troops in Ukraine continues to be widely dismissed as several areas reported continued air strikes overnight and heavy fighting in some cities raged on despite hope that progress was being made on bringing an end to the conflict.

More than a month into its unprovoked invasion, Russia told Ukraine that it would curtail operations near the capital, Kyiv, and the northern city of Chernihiv "to increase mutual trust" for peace talks after the two sides met face-to-face in Istanbul on March 29.

But the governor of the Chernihiv region said on March 30 that he [saw no let-up in Russian attacks](#) overnight, while British military intelligence said that troop movements could be attributed to Russian contingents returning home or to neighboring Belarus to reorganize and resupply after suffering heavy losses on the battlefield.

"Do we believe it [Russia's promise]? Of course not," Governor Vyacheslav Chaus said in a video post on Telegram.

"The enemy demonstrated its 'decreased activity' in the Chernihiv region by carrying out strikes on [the city of] Nizhyn, including air strikes, and all night long they hit [the city of] Chernihiv," he added.

Russia is likely to continue to compensate for its reduced ground maneuver capability through mass artillery and missile strikes, Britain's Defense Ministry said.

Moscow said recently that it had fulfilled the first part of its plan in Ukraine and that its main focus would now be on southeastern Ukraine, where it is trying to capture more territory to turn over to separatists it has supported since 2014.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who is set to speak to the Norwegian parliament on March 30, voiced caution about Russia's promises to scale back some operations, saying in his daily video address late on March 29 that Ukrainians "are not naive people."

"Ukrainians have already learned during these 34 days of invasion, and over the past eight years of the war in Donbass, that the only thing they can trust is a concrete result," [he said](#).

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and U.S. President Joe Biden have also expressed skepticism and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington is focused on Russia's actions, not its words.

"What Russia is doing is the continued brutalization of Ukraine and its people, and that continues as we speak," said Blinken, who is on a tour of the Middle East and spoke at a news conference in Morocco.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Russia was only "repositioning" its forces near Kyiv not withdrawing them.

"It does not mean the threat to Kyiv is over," Kirby said. "They can still inflict massive brutality on the country, including on Kyiv." He said Russian air strikes against Kyiv continued.

"We're not prepared to call this a retreat or even a withdrawal," he said. "We think that what they probably have in mind is a repositioning to prioritize elsewhere."

Thousands of civilians in the southern port city of Mariupol continue to be trapped under repeated shelling and air strikes by Russian forces.

Mariupol has been one of the main focal points of fighting since the start of the invasion more than a month ago. The situation in the city, which numbered some 400,000 people before the war, has been described as "apocalyptic."

The head of the UN human rights mission in Ukraine told Reuters that thousands of civilians may have died in the city since bombing began.

"We do think that there could be thousands of deaths, of civilian casualties, in Mariupol," Matilda Bogner said. The mission did not have a precise estimate but was working to gather more information, she added.

According to the UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, the total number of refugees as of midday on March 29 was 4.02 million, with just over half of that total making their way out of Ukraine and into Poland.

"Refugees from Ukraine are now 4 million, five weeks after the start of the Russian attack," UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said in a tweet on March 30, adding that he had just arrived in Ukraine to discuss ways to increase support "to people affected and displaced by this senseless war."

Moscow's invasion, launched on February 24, has sparked several waves of crippling economic and financial sanctions on Russia.

The Kremlin has tried to fight back with a plan to force payments for energy exports such as gas and oil in rubles.

While the West has balked at such a move, calling it a "breach of contract," Germany, Russia's biggest importer of gas, declared an "early warning" on March 30 of a possible emergency if gas stopped flowing into the country.

Vyacheslav Volodin, the speaker of Russia's parliament, said on March 30 that European politicians need to "stop the talk, stop trying to find some justification about why they cannot pay in rubles."

"If you want gas, find rubles," he said.

Volodin has proposed expanding the ruble payment policy to the country's other main exports - including grain, fertilizers and metals.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 People's convoy rally heading back to Calif.</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.insider.com/peoples-convoy-trucker-rally-washington-dc-california-pandemic-emergency-order-2022-3">https://www.insider.com/peoples-convoy-trucker-rally-washington-dc-california-pandemic-emergency-order-2022-3</a>
GIST	<p>The People's Convoy, an amalgamation of truckers from across the country who staged a continuous protest near Washington DC against COVID-19 restrictions, is returning to California after nearly a month of fruitless demonstration.</p> <p>One of the group's organizers, Mike Landis, announced in a <a href="#">live streamed talk</a> on Sunday night that the group would soon be leaving Hagerstown Speedway, the dirt track in Maryland where they've been situated the past month. The group plans to return to California, where they initially disembarked on February 23.</p> <p>Despite pulling in almost <a href="#">\$2 million in donations</a>, the movement failed to force the government to drop its national emergency order amid the pandemic. Instead, they have spent weeks disrupting commuters while circling the Beltway surrounding Washington and sharing conspiracy theories online.</p> <p>The group plans to protest COVID-19 measures and pending bills in California, which Landis told followers is "more important at this point" than their original goal. He claimed that the group <a href="#">could return</a> one day to Washington to "finish this job."</p> <p>Talia Jane, an internet researcher who has covered the convoy extensively, told Insider that the decision to return to California was probably related to funds depleting and said the protest "was destined to flop."</p> <p>"This was, from the start, a house of cards built on the idea that 'If you build it, they will come,'" Jane said. "That baseline motivator doesn't really work when the 'it' you're building is based on a deep misunderstanding of reality."</p>



Many of the truckers are supporters of former President Donald Trump, including some who adhere to the baseless QAnon conspiracy theory or other far-right movements. The truckers organized the protest, which was inspired by the similar Freedom Convoy in Ottawa, Canada earlier this year, through social media groups and messaging platforms such as Telegram.

But while the Canadian truckers convoy became international news and threw the Canadian government into crisis, the People's Convoy has resulted in limited impact and largely been out of the media spotlight amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The convoy's decision to decamp from the Speedway came after Brian Brase, one of the convoy organizers, said on Sunday morning that he was leaving the dwindling group but "not running away," according to [The Daily Beast](#). Prior to Brase's departure, there had also been widespread factioning and splintering inside the group.

The convoy also tended to fizzle out because participants found that people did not embrace their cause and were eager to push back, Jane said. Numerous DC residents and activists have taken action against the truckers, including one person known as "[Bike Man](#)" who went viral after single-handedly holding up the convoy by pedaling his bicycle slowly in front of them. Other people [yelled at the truckers](#) as they drove by.

"Small things, like getting heckled or soda thrown on them and normal DOT inspections, was enough to convince convoyers they wouldn't have a moment of peace," Jane said.

Despite the group's minimal impact, it has attracted attention from multiple prominent politicians. Republican Rep. [Ted Cruz](#) rode in a truck around the DC Beltway on March 10 to protest vaccine mandates with convoy members. A number of People's Convoy truckers also met on March 8 with Rep. Cruz and Ron Johnson, as well as Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, Matt Gaetz, and Thomas Massie, in talks on Capitol Hill to [share their demands](#).

In a Telegram channel for the People's Convoy with over 44,000 followers, some have expressed frustration about the planned move to California. Many others have simply asked for information about when the convoy would be departing.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 US: Russia pullback 'not a real withdrawal'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2022/03/russias-claim-its-withdrawing-kyiv-not-be-believed-pentagon-warns/363784/">https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2022/03/russias-claim-its-withdrawing-kyiv-not-be-believed-pentagon-warns/363784/</a>
GIST	<p>The Pentagon warned Tuesday that Russia's announcement that it was "<a href="#">drastically reducing hostilities</a>" in Kyiv and Chernihiv is not a real withdrawal and said Russian leader Vladimir Putin still hopes to take all of Ukraine.</p> <p>"Nobody should be fooling ourselves by the Kremlin's now recent claim that it will suddenly just reduce military attacks near Kyiv, or any reports that it's going to withdraw all its forces," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters Tuesday.</p> <p>Kirby said the Pentagon has seen Russia pull back "small numbers" of forces, "but we believe this is a repositioning, not a real withdrawal."</p> <p>On Tuesday, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin said Russia <a href="#">would reduce its military attacks</a> on Kyiv during <a href="#">diplomatic negotiations</a> between the governments.</p> <p>U.S. European Command Gen. Tod Wolters told Congress earlier in the day that his command had observed some Russian pullback, without providing specifics.</p>



“The comments [Fomin] made with respect to the shifting dynamics in the ground domain in the vicinity of Kyiv are exactly what we see from a EUCOM perspective,” Wolters said.

Kirby said Tuesday’s announcement amounted to spin and “moving the goalposts” after Russia has faced a month of resistance, high casualties, and [logistics and intelligence failures](#) in Ukraine. He cited a similar statement by Sergei Rudskoi, Russian general staff head of military operations, who claimed last week that the country’s forces had accomplished their first objective and would concentrate on their only goal, “complete liberation of Donbass.”

In its initial invasion, Russia had come at Ukraine from three axes: from the north, targeting Kyiv; from the east, to include the separatist regions, and from the south, coming out of Crimea, where some forces went west to take Mykolaiv and Kherson, and Mariupol to the east.

The northern advance has been stalled for weeks, symbolized by a stuck 40-mile-long convoy. Now the southern front is also stalled, Kirby said, noting Ukrainian forces repelling attacks in Mykolaiv and Kherson, and fierce fighting in Mariupol, where the city is still resisting despite a weeks-long siege.

“Mr. Putin’s goals stretch far beyond the Donbass. Russia Ministry of Defense’s recent talking points may be an effort to move the goalposts, moderating Russia’s immediate goals and spinning its current lack of progress as part of what would be next steps,” Kirby said.

The drawback of some forces from Kyiv likely means they will be repositioned to attack elsewhere in the country, Kirby said. “The Russians themselves have said in the same breath ....they’re withdrawing, that they’re reprioritizing the Donbass area in eastern Ukraine.”

The eastern Donbass region includes the breakaway territories that Russia took in 2014 and used this year as a pretext for war.

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## Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	03/30 Hive shuts Calif. healthcare organization
SOURCE	<a href="https://therecord.media/hive-ransomware-shuts-down-california-health-care-organization/">https://therecord.media/hive-ransomware-shuts-down-california-health-care-organization/</a>
GIST	<p>Partnership HealthPlan of California, a nonprofit that helps hundreds of thousands of people access health care in California, is in the midst of being attacked by the Hive ransomware group.</p> <p>The organization is one of the largest Medi-Cal Managed Care Plan providers in Northern California and serves more than 610,000 Medi-Cal beneficiaries in 14 northern California counties.</p> <p>It is unclear when the attack began and Partnership HealthPlan of California is currently unable to respond to requests for comment, but local California newspaper <a href="#">The Press Democrat</a> was the first to report on March 24 that the organization was facing technical issues.</p> <p>On its website, the organization said it “began experiencing technical difficulties, resulting in a disruption to certain computer systems.” It has hired cybersecurity experts to deal with the disruption and restore its systems.</p> <p>They urged people and hospitals to contact them by email but said not to include any personal information in the email.</p> <p>“At this time, PHC is unable to receive or process Treatment Authorization Requests (TAR). For procedures scheduled within the next two (2) weeks, inpatient admission or for urgent services, please proceed with providing the necessary treatment(s) and the appropriate TARs can be completed</p>

retroactively,” the organization said on its website, which is down aside from a screen showing this message.

Emsisoft threat analyst Brett Callow shared a screenshot of the Hive ransomware page where the group says it has attacked Partnership HealthPlan of California and stolen the personal information of more than 850,000 people.

The group also claims to have stolen 400 GB from the organization’s servers.

The ransomware gang said it encrypted the organization’s systems on March 19 but only added them to the leak site on March 29.

The FBI [spotlighted the Hive ransomware group](#) in August 2021 after their members ransomed dozens of healthcare organizations last year.

In 2021, Hive attacked [at least 28 healthcare organizations](#), including Memorial Health System in Ohio and West Virginia, which was [hit with a ransomware attack on August 15](#). Callow noted that at least four US hospitals have been hit with ransomware this year.

Memorial Health System CEO Scott Cantley [said in a statement](#) at the time that staff at three hospitals — Marietta Memorial, Selby, and Sistersville General Hospital — were forced to use paper charts.

All urgent surgical cases and radiology exams [were canceled](#) because of the attack. Memorial Health System Emergency Departments were forced to go on diversion due to the attack.

Marietta Memorial Hospital agreed only to keep taking patients suffering from strokes and trauma incidents. Anyone else in need of help simply had to be transported to other hospitals.

The hospital system [ended up paying a ransom](#) to Hive.

“Unfortunately, many health care organizations are confronting the impacts of an evolving cyber threat landscape,” Cantley said at the time. In February, a team of South Korean researchers [published an academic paper](#) on ways organizations can recover files encrypted by the Hive ransomware without paying the attackers for the decryption key.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Thursday is World Backup Day</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://nakedsecurity.sophos.com/2022/03/30/world-backup-day-5-data-recovery-tips-for-everyone/">https://nakedsecurity.sophos.com/2022/03/30/world-backup-day-5-data-recovery-tips-for-everyone/</a>
GIST	<p>Tomorrow is 31 March 2022, and the last day of March is World Backup Day... ...which is a good time for us to remind you of a little saying that we like.</p> <p>You’ll have heard it before if you listen to the <a href="#">Naked Security Podcast</a>; if so, here it is again, because it’s advice that never gets old: The only backup you will ever regret is the one you didn’t make.</p> <p>Try saying that out loud to yourself every time you find yourself thinking, “Should I make a copy of my (thesis, source code, tax documentation, visa application, mortgage files, insurance claim, job offer) now, or should I leave it until (tomorrow, the weekend, year-end, never)?”</p> <p>The good news about backups seems to be that more and more companies are taking the matter seriously, and not only making backups that remain intact after disaster strikes, but also recovering successfully when needed.</p>

We're saying that because, in our [State of Ransomware 2021 Survey](#), 57% of companies who had the misfortune to get hit by ransomware (about one-third of those who responded) were able to recover their data and get their business running again via their backups.

The bad news about backups, however, is that we still had 32% of ransomware respondents who were stuck with paying the criminals instead, which not only increased the cost of getting their business on its feet again, but didn't work reliably anyway.

One-third of those in our survey who paid the ransom nevertheless ended up losing more than half their data, because even crooks who claim to "specialise" in ransomware and extortion don't seem to know how to get the restoration part of the process right. A backup that you can't reliably restore on demand isn't a backup. It isn't even a talisman. It gives you nothing but a false sense of security.

What about the rest of us?

So, what about home users, hobbyists and small businesses?

If even big companies with IT departments, sysadmins and security operations teams have trouble doing backups correctly, what hope do the rest of us have?

The good news is that useful backups don't have to consume a lot of time and money.

Even if you don't regularly backup every data file you've ever created...

...you can still give yourself reasonable security against a total data disaster by identifying the most important files you have, and making a point of looking after them well.

Losing your wedding photos or that video of your daughter's first steps would be disappointing, but it wouldn't stop you getting on with your digital life.

But losing data such as scans of your ID documents, which might be vital in getting back into compromised accounts, or taxation files that you're obliged by law to keep for so many years, could land you in trouble.

So here are our tips for home users and small businesses for World Backup Day:

### 1. DECIDE WHICH DATA IS CRITICAL, AND PROTECT IT PROPERLY

It's OK to decide that you aren't going to back up everything all the time, but you should make a list of the data you need to keep safe, and a rota that lets you keep track of when you last backed it up. If you have a process you use to ensure you pay the household bills regularly, use that system to keep on top of your backups, too. You don't need a high-tech system: even just adding a visible weekly check-box to the calendar in your kitchen wall is a good way to do it.

### 2. REMEMBER THE 3-2-1 PRINCIPLE

The 3-2-1 rule suggests having at least *three* copies of your data, including the master copy; using *two* different types of backup, so that if one fails, it's less likely the other will be similarly affected; and keeping *one* of them offline, and preferably offsite, so you can get at it even if you're locked out of your home or office.

### 3. DON'T LEAVE BACKUPS WHERE CYBERCROOKS CAN FIND THEM

Many people keep backups so they are always online, such as in a live cloud storage account or on a network-attached storage (NAS) device. But if your backups are accessible online, they're also accessible to any crooks who compromise your account or your network. Indeed, ransomware crooks make a point of searching for online backups and wiping them out as part of the attack, hoping to force you into paying up.

Remember the 3-2-1 rule: think of online snapshots and real-time backups as just one of the two backup types you keep, and make sure you always have at least one other backup that's offline. Whether you're at home or at work, remember to unplug offline backup devices and put them somewhere safe unless you are in the process of backing up or restoring, and remember to logout explicitly from cloud backup accounts when you aren't using them.

#### 4. DON'T MAKE BACKUPS THAT EVERYONE CAN READ

Encrypt your backups so that if they're lost or stolen, the thief can't simply read out all your precious data for themselves. Windows has BitLocker, Macs have FileVault, and Linux has LUKS and cryptsetup, which can be used to create encrypted drives and partitions.

There are also numerous archiving tools, some free and open source, that can create encrypted backup files, such as WinZip and 7-Zip.

Note that FileVault and BitLocker are proprietary to Apple and Microsoft respectively, so you will need a matching operating system setup to restore your data. Also, BitLocker for removable drives isn't available on home-user Windows versions. You'll need to upgrade to Windows Pro for that.

#### 5. LEARN HOW TO DO THE "RESTORE" PART OF THE PROCESS

We've helped numerous people over the years who made backups regularly and carefully, but weren't able to get back the files they wanted when they needed to.

Ironically, none of these cases happened because the user forgot or lost their decryption password – they simply weren't well-practised enough in using the restore process to do it reliably, or even at all. Don't be one of those people!

#### BONUS TIP. DON'T PUT IT OFF UNTIL TOMORROW

We'll finish as we started: The only backup you will ever regret is the one you didn't make.

We published this article on the afternoon before World Backup Day specifically so you could get a backup done the night before!

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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Ukraine: personal data FSB officers online</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/data-620-fsb-officers-published/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/data-620-fsb-officers-published/</a>
GIST	<p>The Ukrainian Defense Ministry's Directorate of Intelligence has published what it claims is the personal data of hundreds of Russian intelligence officers online.</p> <p>The data, which was published on Monday, contains the names, addresses and phone numbers of 620 individuals who Ukraine asserts to be officers of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) involved in "criminal activities" in Europe.</p> <p>Ukraine said the alleged FSB officers on the list are registered as living in Lubyanka – the agency's headquarters in Moscow.</p> <p>Other information detailed in the list <a href="#">appears</a> to reveal the alleged agents' vehicle license plates, passport numbers, SIM cards, signatures and the dates and locations of their birth.</p> <p><i>The Times</i> <a href="#">reports</a> that one alleged agent on the list used "jamesbond007" as part of his Skype address.</p> <p>The list was posted on the Directorate of Intelligence's official website. A statement written in Russian to accompany the post read: "Employees of the FSB of Russia involved in the criminal activities of the aggressor-state in Europe."</p> <p>No details were shared as to what criminal activities the alleged Russian agents allegedly committed.</p> <p>Russia has not commented on the published list, the authenticity of which <a href="#">Reuters</a> has been unable to verify.</p>

Andrew Barratt, vice president at cybersecurity advisory services, [Coalfire](#), commented: “As the war between Russia and Ukraine progresses, it’s perhaps inevitable that Russian personal data is shared. Ukraine has mounted a fairly well-publicized and ‘open to all’ cyber campaign, largely coordinated via Telegram and social media.

“There is a potential now for escalation against the Russian FSB agents whose data has been leaked, also demonstrating the asymmetry that can be established by aggressively targeted cyber-attacks.”

Barratt warned that the apparent leakage of FSB officers’ personal data could provide Russia with “false flag cover” and give the Putin administration an excuse for domestic action taken against FSB members who may have been sympathetic to the Ukrainian cause.

He added that the leak “also serves as a warning to the NATO alliance.”

Barratt continued: “If these leaks were the work of a group attaching themselves to the cause, history has shown us how fickle those groups’ allegiances can be.”

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Log4Shell in 1/3<sup>rd</sup> malware infections</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/log4shell-used-in-a-third-of/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/log4shell-used-in-a-third-of/</a>
GIST	<p>The infamous Log4Shell vulnerability was exploited as an initial infection vector in 31% of cases monitored by Lacework over the past six months.</p> <p>The software vendor’s latest <i>Lacework Cloud Threat Report</i> <a href="#">highlights</a> the risks present in today’s digital supply chain.</p> <p>Its findings confirm that the <a href="#">Log4j bug</a> was used extensively by threat actors, as security experts had suspected when it emerged in December last year.</p> <p>Lacework Labs said that while it initially observed a flood of requests with exploit payloads shortly after the Log4Shell disclosure, these were the result mainly of researchers searching for the vulnerability. However, these were replaced by malign requests over time, as threat actors adopted publicly available proof-of-concept exploits.</p> <p>“Over time, we watched scanning activity evolve into more frequent attacks, including some that deployed crypto-miners and Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) bots to affected systems,” it explained.</p> <p>“In addition to improving their payloads, adversaries continued to adapt their exploitation methods to stay ahead of signature-based detections used by many types of security products.”</p> <p>Log4j wasn’t the only software dependency being abused in late 2021. Many threat actors used a backdoor in the NPM package ua-parser-js to open Linux systems to receive and run the open-source cryptocurrency miner, XMRig.</p> <p>The original attacker had managed to compromise the NPM developer’s account to push a malicious update to the package.</p> <p>In fact, threat actors increasingly favor NPM as a vector for attack. <a href="#">A report from Checkmarx</a> this week claimed that attackers had streamlined the process of creating new NPM accounts from which to distribute supply chain malware.</p> <p>“The attacker has fully automated the process of NPM account creation and has open dedicated accounts, one per package, making his new malicious packages much harder to spot,” it explained.</p>

	“At the time of writing, the threat actor ‘RED-LILI’ is still active at the time of writing and continues to publish malicious packages.”
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 FBI probes 100+ ransomware variants</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/fbi-investigating-100-ransomware/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/fbi-investigating-100-ransomware/</a>
GIST	<p>The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is currently investigating more than 100 different variants of ransomware, many of which have been used in multiple ransomware campaigns.</p> <p>Information on the Bureau’s efforts to tackle the malware threat was among the <a href="#">remarks</a> delivered to the United States House Committee on the Judiciary in Washington on Tuesday by Bryan Vorndran, assistant director of the FBI’s Cyber Division.</p> <p>“There is not a day that goes by without multiple FBI field offices responding to ransomware attacks,” said Vorndran, “The ransomware threat is not new, and it has been one of the FBI’s top cybercriminal investigative priorities for some time, but we have seen ransomware attack reporting increase significantly in the past two years, and the impact of these attacks has grown to dangerous proportions, threatening our economic and national security.”</p> <p>Describing the rise in ransomware use, Vorndran said that from 2019 to 2021, the number of ransomware complaints reported to the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) increased by 82%, with a 449% rise in ransom payments over the same period.</p> <p>“‘Ransomware-as-a-service’ (when a developer sells or leases ransomware tools to criminal customers) has decreased the barrier to entry and technological savviness needed to carry out and benefit from these compromises and increased the number of criminals conducting ransomware campaigns,” noted Vorndran.</p> <p>He added that while ransomware actors and tactics have evolved, the motive behind the malware’s use was still maximizing profit by paralyzing victims’ operations.</p> <p>“Cyber-criminals recognize profit can be maximized by targeting organizations where downtime cannot be tolerated – specifically, infrastructure critical to public safety,” said Vorndran, “In 2021 alone, the FBI, CISA, and NSA observed incidents involving ransomware against 14 of the 16 US critical infrastructure sectors.”</p> <p>The FBI has more than 800 cyber-trained agents spread across 56 field offices and more than 350 sub-offices.</p> <p>Vorndran said the Bureau’s reach, unique tools and resources were unmatched by any other organization.</p> <p>He said: “We can put a cyber-trained FBI agent on nearly any doorstep in this country within one hour, and we can accomplish the same in more than 70 countries in one day through our network of legal attachés and cyber assistant legal attachés.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Anonymous hacks Russia industrial firms</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hackread.com/anonymous-hack-russian-industrial-firms-data-leak/">https://www.hackread.com/anonymous-hack-russian-industrial-firms-data-leak/</a>
GIST	<p>The online hacktivist group <a href="#">Anonymous</a> has claimed responsibility for targeting two Russian companies stealing a trove of their data and leaking it online for the public to download.</p> <p><b>MashOil Data Breach</b></p> <p>MashOil is a Moscow based company known for designing, manufacturing, and maintaining equipment used in the drilling, mining, and fracking industries. According to the company’s website, “MashOil LLC is the official representative of the FID Group in the Russian Federation.”</p>



FID Group on the other hand is a group of Belarusian and Russian enterprises specializing in manufacturing equipment for the oil and gas industry in both countries. However, Anonymous has claimed responsibility for targeting the company and stealing a whopping 110 GB worth of its data.

The data includes over 140,000 emails which can be downloaded via torrent and is available on the official website of Distributed Denial of Secrets (aka DDoSecrets), a non-profit whistleblower organization.

On Twitter, @YourAnonNews, one of the largest social media representatives of the Anonymous movement also [confirmed](#) the hack.

### **RostProekt Hack**

RostProekt is a Russian construction company based in the city of Ivanovo. Anonymous claimed to target the company over the weekend and leaked 2.4GB worth of files containing email data. The files can be downloaded via torrent from the official website of DDoSecrets.

As seen by Hackread.com, according to the information posted on the website, RostProekt operates in the “construction, foundation, structure, investments, and building exterior contractors’ industry.

### **Message From Anonymous**

RostProekt data breach was originally announced by @DepaixPorteur, an Anonymous affiliate who also played a vital role in hacking unsecured printers in Russia and sending anti-war and anti-censorship printouts across the country. While addressing the Rostproekt breach, @DepaixPorteur said that, *We are Anonymous. We have created a new site to host our upcoming leaks + future Anonymous leaks. We also hacked Rostproekt emails as a treat to celebrate the new site & to hold you over while waiting for the upcoming dump(s).*

It is worth noting that Anonymous has launched two new websites where the group has been publishing download links and details of previous and future data dumps under Operation OpRussia to mark a protest against the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

### **Anonymous vows 1.22 TB of Russian Leak**

In an exclusive conversation with Hackread.com, @DepaixPorteur revealed that their group is currently working on a large-scale data leak belonging to sensitive Russian institutions. Anonymous said that they plan to leak 1.22TB worth of data in the next couple of weeks to mark a protest against the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

### **Anonymous Cyberwar Against Russia**

It is no secret that Anonymous is standing strong with Ukraine over the ongoing conflict between the two countries. The group has so far targeted both the government and the private sector to spread its message.

On March 26th, 2022, Anonymous not only confirmed [breaching the Central Bank of Russia](#), but also leaked 28GB worth of banking data via DDoSecrets. The list and timeline of some of the cyberattacks reported by Hackread.com on the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine are as follow:

1. **Feb 28th:** [Anonymous hacks EV charging station + TV channels](#)
2. **March 4th:** [Anonymous hacks Russian space research institute website](#)
3. **March 7th:** [Anonymous hacks Russian TV & streaming sites with war footage](#)
4. **March 10th:** [Anonymous hacks 90% of misconfigured Russian cloud databases](#)
5. **March 11th:** [Anonymous Hacks Roskomnadzor](#)
6. **March 12th:** [Anonymous sent 7M texts & hacked 400 Russian security cams](#)
7. **March 15th:** [Anonymous DDoSd Russian Fed Security Service & other sites](#)
8. **March 19th:** [Anonymous hacked & leaked 79GB of Russian pipeline giant data](#)
9. **March 23rd:** [Anonymous hacks printers in Russia to send anti-war messages](#)

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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/legal/fbi-disrupts-bec-cybercrime-gangs-targeting-victims-worldwide/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/legal/fbi-disrupts-bec-cybercrime-gangs-targeting-victims-worldwide/</a>
GIST	<p>A coordinated operation conducted by the FBI and its international law enforcement partners has resulted in disrupting business email compromise (BEC) schemes in several countries.</p> <p>The operation, called “Eagle Sweep”, lasted for three months, starting in September 2021, and resulted in the arrest of 65 suspects in the United States, Nigeria, South Africa, Cambodia, and Canada.</p> <p>BEC actors are high-level scammers who trick employees of real companies into making payments to bank accounts under their control, pretending to be a business partner or a firm submitting a legitimate payment order.</p> <p>Often, these threat actors monitor the communications of their targets, having compromised their corporate network, to identify weak, exploitable points in the financial transactions process.</p> <p>They typically hit at precisely the right moment by hijacking email threads or using spoofed accounts to request the diversion of an actual invoice payment to a new bank account.</p> <p>According to the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) <a href="#">2021 crime report</a>, the financial damage attributed to BEC scams in the year that passed reached \$2.4 billion, only for the reported incidents.</p> <p><b>Highlight arrests</b></p> <p>The <a href="#">FBI announcement states</a> the scammers they apprehended are considered responsible for targeting over 500 firms in the United States, causing financial losses of at least \$51,000,000.</p> <p>Among the arrested individuals, those who stand out are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oluwasegun Baiyewu, 36, of Houston, Texas, and Leo Omorogieva Eghaghe, 39, of Lagos, Nigeria, who victimized a Puerto Rican renewable energy supplier and laundered (together with other groups) about \$4,500,000.</li> <li>• Ashley Crespo, 27; David Alvarado, 21; Wendy Elizabeth Ramos Lopez, 29; Dayana Zaila Ramos, 32; Alvaro Umanzor, 23; Luis Lopez, 39; Jerome Crawford, 25; and Jamal Moore, 25, all of Houston, Texas. The group has laundered (together with others) \$4,500,000 over two years and \$900,000 in just one BEC scam instance.</li> <li>• Bright Osaghni, 41, and Osatohanmwun Oriakhi, 41, both of Toronto, Canada, who attempted to divert over \$16,000,000 from hundreds of victims in the United States and Canada.</li> </ul> <p>In parallel with Operation Eagle Sweep, the law enforcement agencies in Australia, Japan, and Nigeria conducted local operations targeting BEC actors.</p> <p><b>How to spot BEC scams</b></p> <p>The foolproof way to avoid sending money to a BEC scammer is always to call your business partner when you receive a request to send payments to a new bank account via email.</p> <p>For this confirmation, use the phone number you have previously confirmed to be genuine and not any numbers that may be provided in the suspicious email.</p> <p>Additionally, activate multi-factor authentication on your email account and use a strong and unique password to protect it from takeover.</p> <p>Organizations should also ensure that their domain can’t be easily spoofed by registering potentially risky typo-squatting domains themselves.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 National emergency extended</b>
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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/us-national-emergency-extended-due-to-elevated-malicious-cyber-activity/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/us-national-emergency-extended-due-to-elevated-malicious-cyber-activity/</a>
GIST	<p>US President Joe Biden today has extended the state of national emergency declared to deal with increasingly prevalent and severe malicious cyber threats to the United States national security, foreign policy, and economy.</p> <p>The national emergency was declared on April 1, 2015, by former President Barack Obama through <a href="#">Executive Order 13694</a>, which also sanctioned the individuals coordinating or contributing to cyberattacks against the US.</p> <p>On December 28, 2016, Obama issued <a href="#">Executive Order 13757</a> to amend E.O. 13694 because such malicious attacks were being used to undermine democratic processes and institutions.</p> <p>In the context of E.O. 13694, such <a href="#">cyber-enabled malicious activity</a> includes critical infrastructure breaches, denial of service attacks, and data theft incidents that pose a significant threat to US national security, foreign policy, economic health, or financial stability.</p> <p>"Significant malicious cyber-enabled activities originating from, or directed by persons located, in whole or in substantial part, outside the United States continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States," President Biden <a href="#">said</a>.</p> <p>"Therefore, I have determined that it is necessary to continue the national emergency declared in Executive Order 13694 with respect to significant malicious cyber-enabled activities."</p> <p><a href="#">Biden's notice</a> extended the national emergency declared in E.O. 13694 to continue in effect beyond April 1, 2022, under section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)).</p> <p><b>US organizations warned to defend their networks</b></p> <p>The Biden admin's decision follows a "SHIELDS UP!" warning issued by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) for all US organizations, asking them to take proactive measures to defend their networks.</p> <p>"Russia's invasion of Ukraine could impact organizations both within and beyond the region, to include malicious cyber activity against the U.S. homeland, including as a response to the unprecedented economic costs imposed on Russia by the U.S. and our allies and partners," CISA <a href="#">says</a>.</p> <p>"Evolving intelligence indicates that the Russian Government is exploring options for potential cyberattacks. Every organization—large and small—must be prepared to respond to disruptive cyber incidents."</p> <p>In February, CISA and the FBI also warned US orgs that data wiping attacks targeting Ukraine <a href="#">might spill over to targets from other countries</a>.</p> <p>The joint advisory came on the heels of malware attacks targeting Ukraine with <a href="#">the HermeticWiper malware</a> and <a href="#">ransomware decoys</a> and aiming to destroy data and render targeted devices unbootable.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 Calendly abused in credentials phishing</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/calendly-actively-abused-in-microsoft-credentials-phishing/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/calendly-actively-abused-in-microsoft-credentials-phishing/</a>
GIST	<p>Phishing actors are actively abusing Calendly to kick off a clever sequence to trick targets into entering their email account credentials on the phishing page.</p> <p>Calendly is a very popular free calendar app with Zoom integration, used for scheduling meetings and appointments, and is commonly used by organizations to send out invitations for upcoming events.</p>

As such, using it to send out malicious links blends very well with the daily work background of most victims, so it's unlikely for these attempts to raise suspicions.

Also, emails generated and sent by legitimate platforms are commonly considered trustworthy by email security tools, so they tend to reach targetted inboxes rather than the spam folder.

Finally, Calendly allows new users to register on the platform without entering credit card information or any other identification proof, making it an easy platform to abuse.

The first signs of Calendly abuse started towards the end of February, as reported by analysts at INKY, who have shared their report with Bleeping Computer before publication.

### **Abusing Calendly for phishing attacks**

The phishing attack begins with phishing emails generated on the Calendly platform that inform the recipient they received new Fax documents.

To create these emails, the threat actors abused a Calendly feature that allows users to create customized invite emails and an "Add Custom Link" function to insert a malicious link on the event page.

That link is embedded on a "View Documents" button and injected into the calendar screen, so if clicked, it takes the recipient to the actual phishing landing page used to steal login credentials.

INKY discovered that no matter the lures in this phishing campaign, the landing page always impersonated a Microsoft login form with the document supposedly blurred in the background.

Any credentials entered in the dialog will go straight to the threat actors, while the victim will be prompted to enter them again due to supposedly entering a wrong password.

This is a widespread trick in phishing campaigns today, as forcing the user to enter their credentials twice minimizes the chances of stealing passwords with typo errors and sometimes even helps in snatching two account credentials.

After the second attempt, the victim is automatically redirected to the domain of the email account they entered to minimize the chances of the victim realizing the compromise.

### **What to watch out for**

Although this is the first time phishing actors have abused the Calendly platform, all other tricks employed in this campaign are pretty standard.

These include generating malicious messages sent from a [legitimate online service](#), asking the user to log in to view a [blurred document](#) in the background, forcing the victims to [enter their credentials twice](#), and [redirecting](#) them to a trustworthy website at the end.

Two obvious signs of fraud in this campaign are the requirement to use Microsoft SharePoint credentials to view Calendly-hosted content and the URL on the phishing page, which is neither on the Microsoft nor on the Calendly domains.

Finally, using a password manager is an easy way around all these tricks, particularly beneficial to careless users, as if the URL on the login page doesn't match the one stored in the vault, the credentials won't be filled out.

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HEADLINE	03/30 Sinister way: enter MFA prompt bombing
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wired.com/story/multifactor-authentication-prompt-bombing-on-the-rise/">https://www.wired.com/story/multifactor-authentication-prompt-bombing-on-the-rise/</a>

**MULTIFACTOR AUTHENTICATION (MFA)** is a core defense that is among the most effective at preventing account takeovers. In addition to requiring that users provide a username and [password](#), MFA ensures they must also use an additional factor—be it a fingerprint, physical security key, or one-time password—before they can access an account. Nothing in this article should be construed as saying MFA isn't anything other than essential.

That said, some forms of MFA are stronger than others, and recent events show that these weaker forms aren't much of a hurdle for some hackers to clear. In the past few months, suspected script kiddies like the [Lapsus\\$ data extortion gang](#) and [elite Russian-state threat actors](#) (like Cozy Bear, the group behind the [SolarWinds hack](#)) have both successfully defeated the protection.

### Enter MFA Prompt Bombing

The strongest forms of MFA are based on a framework called [FIDO2](#), which was developed by a consortium of companies to balance security and simplicity of use. It gives users the option of using fingerprint readers or cameras built into their devices or dedicated security keys to confirm that they are authorized to access an account. FIDO2 forms of MFA are [relatively new](#), so many services for both consumers and large organizations have yet to adopt them.

That's where older, weaker forms of MFA come in. They include one-time passwords sent through SMS or generated by mobile apps like Google Authenticator or push prompts sent to a mobile device. When someone is logging in with a valid password, they also must either enter the one-time password into a field on the sign-in screen or push a button displayed on the screen of their phone.

It's this last form of authentication that recent reports say is being bypassed. One group using this technique, [according](#) to security firm Mandiant, is Cozy Bear, a band of elite hackers working for Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service. The group also goes under the names Nobelium, APT29, and the Dukes.

"Many MFA providers allow for users to accept a phone app push notification or to receive a phone call and press a key as a second factor," Mandiant researchers wrote. "The [Nobelium] threat actor took advantage of this and issued multiple MFA requests to the end user's legitimate device until the user accepted the authentication, allowing the threat actor to eventually gain access to the account."

[Lapsus\\$](#), a hacking gang that has breached [Microsoft](#), [Okta](#), and [Nvidia](#) in recent months, has also used the technique.

"No limit is placed on the amount of calls that can be made," a member of Lapsus\$ wrote on the group's official Telegram channel. "Call the employee 100 times at 1 am while he is trying to sleep, and he will more than likely accept it. Once the employee accepts the initial call, you can access the MFA enrollment portal and enroll another device."

The Lapsus\$ member claimed that the MFA prompt-bombing technique was effective against Microsoft, which earlier this week said the hacking group was able to access the laptop of one of its employees.

"Even Microsoft!" the person wrote. "Able to login to an employee's Microsoft VPN from Germany and USA at the same time and they didn't even seem to notice. Also was able to re-enroll MFA twice."

Mike Grover, a seller of red-team hacking tools for security professionals and a red-team consultant who goes by the Twitter handle [\\_MG\\_](#), told Ars the technique is "fundamentally a single method that takes many forms: tricking the user to acknowledge an MFA request. 'MFA Bombing' has quickly become a descriptor, but this misses the more stealthy methods."

Methods include:

- Sending a bunch of MFA requests and hoping the target finally accepts one to make the noise stop.
- Sending one or two prompts per day. This method often attracts less attention, but "there is still a good chance the target will accept the MFA request."

- Calling the target, pretending to be part of the company, and telling the target they need to send an MFA request as part of a company process.

“Those are just a few examples,” Grover said, but it’s important to know that mass bombing is NOT the only form this takes.”

In a [Twitter thread](#), he wrote, “Red teams have been playing with variants on this for years. It’s helped companies fortunate enough to have a red team. But real world attackers are advancing on this faster than the collective posture of most companies has been improving.”

Other researchers were quick to point out that the MFA prompt technique is not new.

“Lapsus\$ did not invent 'MFA prompt bombing,’” Greg Linares, a red-team professional, [tweeted](#). “Please stop crediting them ... as creating it. This attack vector has been a thing used in real world attacks 2 years before lapsus was a thing.”

### **Good Boy, FIDO**

As noted earlier, FIDO2 forms of MFA aren’t susceptible to the technique, as they’re tied to the physical machine someone is using when logging in to a site. In other words, the authentication must be performed on the device that is logging in. It can’t happen on one device to give access to a different device.

But that doesn’t mean organizations that use FIDO2-compliant MFA can’t be susceptible to prompt bombing. It’s inevitable that a certain percentage of people enrolled in these forms of MFA will lose their key, drop their iPhone in the toilet, or break the fingerprint reader on their laptop.

Organizations must have contingencies in place to deal with these unavoidable events. Many will fall back on more vulnerable forms of MFA in the event that an employee loses the key or device required to send the additional factor. In other cases, the hacker can trick an IT administrator into resetting the MFA and enrolling a new device. In still other cases, FIDO2-compliant MFA is merely one option, but less secure forms are still permitted.

“Reset/backup mechanisms are always very juicy for attackers,” Grover said.

In other cases, companies that use FIDO2-compliant MFA rely on third parties to manage their network or perform other essential functions. If the third-party employees can access the company’s network with weaker forms of MFA, that largely defeats the benefit of the stronger forms.

Even when companies use FIDO2-based MFA everywhere, Nobelium has been able to [defeat the protection](#). That bypass, however, was possible only after the hackers completely compromised a target’s Active Directory, the heavily fortified database tool that network admins use to create, delete, or modify user accounts and assign them privileges to access authorized resources. That bypass is beyond the scope of this post because once an AD is hacked, it’s pretty much game over.

Again, *any* form of MFA is better than no use of MFA. If SMS-delivered one-time passwords are all that’s available—as fallible and distasteful as they may be—the system is still infinitely better than having *no* MFA. Nothing in this post is intended to say that MFA isn’t worth the hassle.

But it’s clear that MFA on its own is not enough, and it hardly constitutes a box that organizations can check and be done with it. When Cozy Bear found these loopholes, no one was especially surprised, given the group’s infinite resources and top-notch tradecraft. Now that teenagers are using the same techniques to breach companies as powerful as Nvidia, Okta, and Microsoft, people are beginning to recognize the importance of using MFA correctly.

“While it may be tempting to dismiss LAPSUS\$ as an immature and fame-seeking group,” reporter Brian Krebs of KrebsOnSecurity [wrote last week](#), “their tactics should make anyone in charge of corporate security sit up and take notice.”

	MFA prompt bombing may not be new, but it's no longer something that companies can ignore.
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Russia copies banned social media sites</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/mar/30/russia-banned-social-media-platforms-rossgram">https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/mar/30/russia-banned-social-media-platforms-rossgram</a>
GIST	<p>The creators of Rossgram call it Russia's answer to Instagram. Its critics call it "absolute shit".</p> <p>As Russia continues its invasion of Ukraine, opportunistic developers have rolled out a suite of locally made social networks to replace services such as Instagram that have been blocked by the government, or YouTube, which is under growing pressure.</p> <p>Many appear to be hasty imitations or include obvious attempts at surveilling ordinary Russians, as the Kremlin tries to censor news about the war and further clamp down on dissent under the country's president, Vladimir Putin.</p> <p>"We are very sad that many good and popular services for different reasons are halting their work in Russia", wrote the creators of Grustnogram, which translates roughly as Sadgram, a parody (but working) social network where Russians can post black-and-white selfies to lament Russia's growing online isolation and "grieve together".</p> <p>"We are even sadder about what absolute shit is sometimes being offered up as substitutes", the creators wrote.</p> <p>Already, some Russian state media and government agencies have begun moving their videos to RuTube, a YouTube alternative owned by the state-run Gazprom-Media.</p> <p>Even before the outbreak of the war, Russian authorities had been offering money to Russian influencers to switch over to the platform, a recent investigation showed. Uploads are reviewed by moderators before going on the site, but Russians who sign up through a government website that includes passport data can be "authorised".</p> <p>NashStore, a Russian replacement for Google Play that takes the Mir payment system, a local alternative to Visa and Mastercard, is reportedly due to launch on May 9, the Victory Day holiday that has become the main patriotic holiday under Putin.</p> <p>The standard-bearer for the domestics apps is Rossgram, which was announced shortly after Russia declared Instagram's creator, Meta, an extremist organisation earlier this month.</p> <p>Instead of releasing a fully usable site this week, the Russian developers instead gave a short preview.</p> <p>It looked a lot like Instagram, including a similar colour scheme, icons and other trademark features.</p> <p>That may fly in Russia now, where the government on Wednesday announced that it would begin to ignore copyright restrictions in a policy it calls "parallel imports" that essentially legalises intellectual piracy.</p> <p>"The goal of this mechanism is to satisfy the demand for [intellectual] goods", said Mikhail Mishustin, the Russian prime minister. "Until now, we couldn't sell [them] on the territory of our country without the agreement of the copyright holder."</p> <p>The list of products, which will probably include films, television shows and video games, will be drawn up by a Russian government agency.</p>



	<p>The policy essentially reverses decades of efforts to crack down on bootleg movies and other content available in underground shops or on social networks like VKontakte, which had boasted of its efforts to remove illegal uploads in recent years.</p> <p>Putin on Wednesday also ordered government agencies to cease orders of foreign operating systems, which will include popular products from Microsoft, in the “interests of securing the technological independence and safety of Russia’s critical information infrastructure”. Russian government offices were ordered to stop using foreign operating systems by 2025.</p> <p>For now, however, some Russian officials and even agencies like the Ministry of Defence have continued to use applications like Facebook despite the official decision banning Meta, its parent company.</p> <p>Alexander Tokarev, the creator of Grustnogram, said that he was inspired to create the service after watching to roll out of Rossgram. Altogether, it took four people working for seven days around their normal jobs to put together the site, he said.</p> <p>“The idea came to mind when I saw Rossgram”, he told a local news site. “It was so embarrassing and ridiculous that I had an irresistible desire to make a response. This, of course, is primarily a statement. Because no one needs a Russian analogue [for Instagram] – it’s absurd.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Spring is here; also seasonal scams</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/technology/personaltech/scams-phishing-spring.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/technology/personaltech/scams-phishing-spring.html</a>
GIST	<p>Fraud is a year-round activity, but tax season brings an uptick in calculated schemes to steal money and personal information through spoofed messages and other means. Cybersecurity firms have also reported an increase in fraud attempts that exploit the <a href="#">conflict in Ukraine</a> — a situation that has increased fears of potential cyberattacks on American companies through ransomware and other malicious software.</p> <p>You can better protect yourself if you know what’s out there. Here’s a guide.</p> <p><b>Avoid the tax scam</b></p> <p>The Internal Revenue Service doesn’t make first contact with taxpayers by email, text messages or social media channels to request personal and financial information — including bank-account or credit-card numbers, passwords or PIN codes. Messages asking for that information are deceptive “phishing” attempts to steal money and identities.</p> <p>If the IRS needs your attention, it starts with a notice by regular mail via the U.S. Postal Service in most cases.</p> <p>The IRS will not send unexpected messages about auditing returns, sending stimulus payments, collecting your taxes or “canceling your Social Security number.” An IRS representative may call or visit when a taxpayer has an overdue bill or has other tax-related issues. But even then, written notification is typically sent first, according to the agency.</p> <p>Scam telephone calls and voice messages using spoofed agency numbers and forged IRS agent identification are common. Again, the agency typically first sends a notice by mail. It does not call unexpectedly to discuss tax refunds, threaten arrest by local law enforcement or demand immediate payment in a specific form. Tax bills are paid to the U.S. Treasury and not directly to “agents” requiring funds in iTunes or Amazon gift cards, prepaid debit cards, electronic cash or wire transfer.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Tax Scams/Consumer Alerts</a> page on the official <a href="https://www.irs.gov">irs.gov</a> site has a lengthy list of current and classic scams. And the site has a guide for verifying real IRS agents and identifying legitimate debt collectors.</p> <p><b>Donate wisely</b></p>



Opportunistic scammers are quick to take advantage of natural disasters and humanitarian crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Be leery of messages from unfamiliar organizations requesting donations by credit card or cryptocurrency — or purporting to be from refugees or members of the military. Crowdfunding campaigns should be avoided or heavily scrutinized unless you know the organizer.

If you want to donate but aren't sure where, assessment sites like [CharityWatch](#) and [Charity Navigator](#) have guides for where your contribution can help the most.

And when you do find a preferred charity's site, check the URL carefully. Scammers use "typosquatting" (registering a purposely misspelled domain name close to a legitimate site's address) in the hope that bad typists will inadvertently land on their malicious pages.

### **Report a scam attempt**

If you get unsolicited email pretending to be from the IRS, you can report it by forwarding the message to [phishing@irs.gov](mailto:phishing@irs.gov). The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration has a hotline to report tax-related fraud attempts at 800-366-4484; the department has a portal page for complaints.

You can make a general fraud report on the Federal Trade Commission's site at [ftc.gov](https://www.ftc.gov).

Gmail and Outlook.com include menus to report phishing attempts, while Yahoo has a form to fill out. Be warned, though: If you get taken in by a scam involving a [Zelle money transfer](#), your bank may not back you up if you authorized the transaction.

### **Be wary**

As the Federal Trade Commission notes, the common signs of a scam usually include someone who impersonates a familiar organization and tells you there's a problem (or, sometimes, a prize). The scammer pressures you to act immediately and demands payment in a specific way.

Most fraud attempts are easy to spot. Typo-laden messages, impersonal "official correspondence" from Gmail and Yahoo accounts, and voicemail messages left in robotic computer speech are instant red flags. Fake invoices and forged PayPal notices remain popular phishing lures.

You can avoid many phishing lures by fine-tuning your mail program's junk filters and blocking unwanted calls and text senders. Let unknown callers go to voicemail.

Make sure your browser is set to block pop-up messages and warn about malicious sites. Don't install apps from unknown developers, and keep anti-virus software enabled on your computer.

If spam gets through, don't call the number and don't open the attachment — it's likely to be malware. If you have concerns about an account, open your browser and go to the company's website, avoiding links in messages.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's site at [consumerfinance.gov](https://consumerfinance.gov) has a detailed page (look under the Consumer Education tab) on [frauds and scams](#) currently going around. And even if you've been practicing safe computing for years, you probably have a friend or relative who isn't as tech savvy — and could use your help.

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HEADLINE	03/30 Spam texts from own phone number?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/business/spam-texts-verizon.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/business/spam-texts-verizon.html</a>
GIST	Wireless carrier Verizon blamed "bad actors" Wednesday for thousands of spam text messages recently received by its customers and said it was working with federal law enforcement agencies to try to identify the source.

The telecom giant confirmed in a statement Wednesday that its customers had been targeted by the rogue texts offering them a free gift, which were reported Monday by The Verge, a technology news website. Some users had reported being forwarded to Russian state media sites when they clicked on links in the texts, but Verizon was treating the texts as a more typical phishing scheme aimed at defrauding consumers.

“As part of a recent fraud scheme, bad actors have been sending text messages to some Verizon customers which appear to come from the customers’ own number,” the statement said. “Our company has significantly curtailed this current activity, but virtually all wireless providers have faced similar fraudulent activity in recent months.”

The scheme highlighted a steady rise in the number of complaints filed with the federal government by consumers who said they were the victims of spam text messages.

In response to follow-up questions Wednesday, a Verizon spokesperson said that the company believed that several thousand of its customers had received the texts as part of a broader scheme affecting major wireless carriers.

The spokesperson, Rich Young, said Verizon had blocked one of the numbers that sent some of the messages but that the source was continuing to use other numbers to spam customers.

There was no indication, Young said, that the messages came from Russia, which has been suspected of carrying out cyberattacks amid that country’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

According to Verizon, it was working with the FBI and the U.S. Secret Service to identify the source of the texts, which enticed recipients to click on a link offering them a free gift. Security experts generally advise against clicking on links sent from strange or unrecognized accounts.

The intent of the fraudulent solicitations is to get people to enter their credit card information, Young said. Clicking on the link would not have likely exposed those customers’ cellphones to malware, he added.

The FBI declined to comment Wednesday. The U.S. Secret Service did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

T-Mobile said in an email Wednesday that it had found no evidence of its customers receiving the text messages but that it had added the known links identified as part of the fraud scheme to its spam-blocking filters.

An AT&T spokesperson said in an email Wednesday that the company was closely monitoring the situation but had not seen anything similar on its network.

In 2021, the Federal Trade Commission said it received 377,840 reports of fraud stemming from text message solicitations, with losses totaling \$131 million. The median amount lost was \$900, according to the commission.

Cellphone users can report suspicious text messages by copying messages and forwarding them to the number 7726, which spells SPAM, a reporting service that was created by the GSMA, a wireless consortium whose members include Verizon.

Most smartphones include features for blocking unwanted calls and text messages. To try to keep telemarketers and other solicitors at bay, consumers can also add their numbers to a federal do-not-call registry.

But those barriers have not stopped fraudsters from trying to bait cellphone users to relinquish financial information and other personal data with offers that include free gifts. Some fraudulent texts invite the recipients to click on links with tracking updates for fictitious shipments.

	<p>Suspect text messages should be treated with the same heightened vigilance as suspect emails, one cybersecurity expert said Wednesday.</p> <p>“Don’t click on the links, especially if something doesn’t seem right,” said Tim Weber, security services director for ADNET Technologies in Rocky Hill, Connecticut. “On the surface, they seem to be like phishing emails.”</p> <p>Weber advised people to use built-in security features on smartphones to prevent them from being compromised, including biometric locks — those using thumbprints or facial recognition — and two-factor authentication.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 New way to report illegal robocalls</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/wa-launches-new-way-to-report-illegal-robocalls/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/wa-launches-new-way-to-report-illegal-robocalls/</a>
GIST	<p>Robocalls aren’t just annoying — some are actually illegal. As of Tuesday, there’s a new way for Washingtonians to report them.</p> <p>In a continuation of the office’s work to stop illegal robocalls, Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson launched a new form for people to report tillegal, harassing calls.</p> <p>Certain types of robocalls — phone calls that come from an automated system and play a recorded message — are legal.</p> <p>According to the attorney general’s office, political calls about candidates, charities asking for donations or informational messages like ones for a flight or a school closure are allowed without permission.</p> <p>But the illegal robocalls can be irritating, or worse, scams to steal your identity or money.</p> <p>Before this form was launched, Washingtonians could report suspicious calls through the attorney general’s office general consumer complaint form. The new complaint form for robocalls will provide more precise information for quicker reaction to complaints, the attorney general’s office said.</p> <p>“Many of our cases are based on tips we receive from Washingtonians. If robocalls are harassing you, please file a complaint with my office,” Ferguson said in a statement.</p> <p>Ferguson’s office said it has resources to track suspected illegal robocallers once people report a call and provide their own number, provider and exact time and date of the call, even when the caller identification is fake.</p> <p>In the past two years, Ferguson has filed three lawsuits dealing with illegal robocalls.</p> <p>In March 2021, a lawsuit filed by several attorneys general and the FTC resulted in two companies that made 1.7 million robocalls into Washington paying \$495,000 to legitimate charities. In August 2020, a King County Superior Court judge ordered Vancouver-based air duct cleaning companies and their owner pay \$10 million in civil penalties after the companies made more than 13 million robocalls within a two year period.</p> <p>The attorney general’s office filed a third lawsuit last October, which is pending, arguing that an Oregon-based company illegally called Washington residents more than 54,000 times with deceptive recorded messages.</p> <p>Washington residents can now report suspected illegal robocalls at: <a href="https://fortress.wa.gov/atg/formhandler/ago/robocallForm.aspx">fortress.wa.gov/atg/formhandler/ago/robocallForm.aspx</a></p>

Phone scams and other illegal telemarketing calls can still be reported with the general consumer complaint form, available at: [atg.wa.gov/file-complaint](https://atg.wa.gov/file-complaint)

Complaints can also be made to the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, which received more than 6,000 complaints of phone solicitations from Washington residents in February, according to Ferguson's office.

To reduce the number of robocalls you receive, you can add your number to the national "do not call" registry at [donotcall.gov](https://donotcall.gov)

In addition to creating the new form, the attorney general's office also shared information about robocalls and telemarketing scams, as well as tips to combat them at [atg.wa.gov/robocall-and-telemarketing-scams](https://atg.wa.gov/robocall-and-telemarketing-scams).

Here are some of the strategies the office suggests:

**Know the following signs of a scam:**

- Requests of personal information like your password, social security or bank account number
- Offers for something for free or at a low cost
- Requests for payment other than a credit card, like a gift card or online money transfer
- Scare tactics like threatening to cut off utilities. The government or legitimate businesses usually send a letter if there is a legal issue or problem.

**What to do if you suspect a call is scam:**

- If you don't recognize a number, consider allowing the call to go to voicemail. If you pick up, you can hang up immediately and report the call or ask your telephone service to block the number associated.
- However, know that scammers can fake the name and number that appears on your caller ID, so you can't always trust it
- Hang up immediately if you answer a call and it is a robocall
- Do not to pay or accept any offers.
- Resist the urge to call back or confront the caller

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HEADLINE	03/29 Pierce Co. school district cyberattack
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article259407324.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article259407324.html</a>
GIST	<p>Clover Park School District officials did not pay cyberhackers who infiltrated the district's computer systems last year, but the attack still exacted a price.</p> <p>The district cut ties with its cybersecurity firm, after paying \$300,000 for 11 years of service, and undertook substantial measures to get its systems back online.</p> <p>Even now, some district information remains on the dark web. All according to documents obtained by The News Tribune through a public records request.</p> <p>Since the attack, the school district has ramped up software security, threat detection and response protection.</p> <p>Due to recent U.S. sanctions and involvement in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, security experts expect an uptick in direct Russian cyberattacks. As the threat of attacks loom, the district's data breach serves as a reminder to governments and school districts to be careful with their data.</p> <p>Clover Park was hit by a Russian cyberhacking group known as Grief in May 2021. Grief is a ransomware group with ties to Russia-based Evil Corp, according to software experts.</p> <p>Brett Callow works at Emsisoft, a cybersecurity firm that helps recover data stolen in ransomware attacks. He said no one program or tactic can guarantee protection. "It's really a matter of stacking layer upon layer of protection. Once they have access to the network, they can potentially simply switch off the antivirus or anti-malware protection," Callow told The News Tribune.</p>

The News Tribune obtained district emails on the cyberattack that detail a rapid IT response and a concern over projected costs from a software company to resolve the data breach.

The head of the Information Technology Department, Craig Cook, emailed staff warning about the cyberattack on May 17. Early that morning, malware began circulating on about 800 computers, which had been previously protected by an anti-malware software called Sophos. There were no reports of student devices being affected a statement to the school board said.

In an update to the school board, Cook said 600 devices had been restored by May 20. District staff declined to be interviewed for this story but responded to The News Tribune's emailed questions.

The district believes Grief hackers accessed the school's system between May 12, 2021 and May 26, 2021. The district declined to share the nature of the attack, citing security concerns.

"Due to our preparedness, CPSD remained operational throughout the event," district spokesperson Leanna Albrecht said in an email.

On May 19, the district realized its website — [cloverpark.k12.wa.us](http://cloverpark.k12.wa.us) — was compromised. The following day, the district decided to uninstall Sophos. Two hundred computers were still infected, according to emails. All district schools and office buildings were affected, the district told the school board.

The district announced its move to a different website on June 4. The district launched a temporary website at [cpsd.cloverpark.k12.wa.us](http://cpsd.cloverpark.k12.wa.us) that was used throughout the summer.

Cook told staff in a district email the malware was called Dridex.

Data breaches can occur from an employee clicking a false link or downloading an attachment that can spread within the district system. Dridex is a type of "remote access" software that can be used to do various things, including deploy ransomware that encrypts the data, Callow said.

Grief uploaded school documents on the dark web. The dark web consists of hidden websites untraceable through a conventional search engine and uses encryption software to provide anonymity for users.

Screenshots of administrative-leave letters, student-performance results and a photo of children were released and listed as Clover Park School District data. The district's data was listed alongside data from seven other entities, which also appear to have been hit by Grief, according to webpages viewed by The News Tribune.

In October, Grief also stole data from the National Rifle Association, holding it for ransom, according to the Associated Press. Cyberware experts say Grief is a rebranding of Evil Corp.

In 2019, the U.S. Treasury sanctioned Evil Corp and charged two members with criminal violations. The government blamed the hackers for the development and distribution of the Dridex malware.

"Evil Corp has used the Dridex malware to infect computers and harvest login credentials from hundreds of banks and financial institutions in over 40 countries, causing more than \$100 million in theft," a 2019 news release said. "This malicious software has caused millions of dollars of damage to U.S. and international financial institutions and their customers."

The State Department is offering a reward up to \$5 million for information leading to the capture or conviction of Evil Corp's leader.

While a school district doesn't seem necessarily like a profitable target, Callow said, cyber insurance plans can include data-ransom payments, and some schools opt to pay.

“Hackers are nothing but predictable. If they find a particular sector is profitable for them, they will keep on hacking it over and over again,” he said. “Many school districts have cyber-insurance. There is a school of thought which contends that insurance contributes to the problem because organizations are more inclined to pay and pay more if the money isn’t coming from their own pockets.”

#### CYBERATTACKS A GROWING CONCERN

The district was one of dozens of organizations hit by cyberattacks in Washington last year. The state Attorney General’s Office tracks cyberattacks. From July 2020 to July 2021, organizations reported 280 data breaches to the state. That’s a 500 percent increase over the previous year’s 78.

More than 60 percent of the reported cyberattacks were considered ransomware breaches. Nearly three quarters of all breaches reported this year resulted in a Washingtonian’s name and date of birth being compromised, the state report said.

The office said three school districts were hit: the regional Puget Sound Education Service District, Clark County’s Evergreen Public Schools and Clover Park School District.

Governments and public agencies also were targets last year, including the Washington State Auditor’s Office and the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries, the City of Ellensburg and the City of Redmond.

#### THE COST OF FIGHTING MALWARE

Asked how much the ransom was and the reason not to pay it, Clover Park officials decline to answer because the attack on the district is part of an open FBI investigation.

The Seattle office of the FBI would not confirm nor deny an investigation is underway, citing Department of Justice policy.

“However, any person or entity who is the victim of a cyberattack should report it to us,” the office said.

When Cook reached out to Sophos for help the day the district discovered the breach, he was told too many computers had been affected for the software to run properly, an email said. The company told the school district the cost for “rapid response” service would be \$744,000. After 11 years as customers, Cook was upset that no help was given or advice on malware removal.

Since 2010, the district has paid \$313,217 to Sophos for ongoing security monitoring, Albrecht said.

“My entire team of 17 technicians has been working since 7 a.m. while removing the malware machine by machine, will probably be here all night. I am extremely disappointed and feel that the trust we placed in Sophos has been completely broken,” Cook told the software company.

Sophos told The News Tribune the company works closely with schools across the country to help secure networks and protect sensitive data. With Clover Park, Sophos cut its price to help.

“Recognizing the unique pressures that today’s schools face, Sophos offers a significant discount to school districts; in this situation, we understood time was of the essence given early indicators of attack, so we extended the discount even further in an effort to quickly deploy a dedicated incident response team to provide advanced security and 24/7 monitoring across more than 10,000 computers,” company spokesperson Lesley Sullivan said in an email.

Sophos later emailed Clover Park staff after Cook’s complaint, according to district emails. The software company offered their rapid response services at a discounted \$372,000.

Rather than contract with Sophos for cleanup and recovery, the district used a forensic investigator approved by its insurance provider, Washington Schools Risk Management Pool. Clover Park is covered by the provider’s data privacy and cybersecurity insurance, Albrecht said.

“Sophos is a malware detection application and one measure of security. Insurance is a different measure of support, which doesn’t does not provide protection from malware,” Albrecht said. The district reviewed potentially affected files to determine whether any sensitive information was accessed, Albrecht said.

The investigation was concluded on Aug. 27 when the district sent letters to those “whose sensitive information was present on the potentially affected computer systems,” Albrecht told The News Tribune.

Clover Park did not pay the ransom and the system was restored, Albrecht said.

The data extracted remains available for anyone to download on the dark web, Callow said.

Files titled staffing, capital projects and human resource records are available. Even if an organization paid the ransom, Callow said there is no guarantee that data would stay off the web.

The best form of protection against a cyberattack is preemptive and all-encompassing. “Once the attackers access the data, they are essentially the new admins,” Callow said. “Preventing these attacks really requires multiple layers of security.” He recommends organizations train employees about phishing attempts, require two-factor authentication and that internet servers be protected with antivirus software.

“You really need to get all these things right,” Callow said. Albrecht said Clover Park’s system now requires a multi-factor authentication. New software has been installed to scan emails for malicious attachments.

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HEADLINE	03/30 BBB warns new pay-at-the-gas pump scam
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/better-business-bureau-warns-of-a-new-pay-at-the-gas-pump-scam-kearney-nebraska-federal-bureau-of-investigation-skimming-shimming">https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/better-business-bureau-warns-of-a-new-pay-at-the-gas-pump-scam-kearney-nebraska-federal-bureau-of-investigation-skimming-shimming</a>
GIST	<p>KEARNEY, Neb. (<a href="#">KHGI</a>) — Scammers are using new ways to snag important information while people are <a href="#">filling up at the pump</a>. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, skimming costs consumers and financial institutions close to \$1 billion each year.</p> <p>“What went from a \$30 fill up, now becomes a \$50 fill up, now becomes a \$100 fill up,” said Josh Planos, Vice President of Communications &amp; Public Relations at the Better Business Bureau.</p> <p>That’s what Stacey Bradley said happened to her after a normal stop for gas.</p> <p>“It happened twice on the same card before they caught it,” said Bradley.</p> <p>Although skimming was the method scammers chose, the BBB said “shimming” is the new skimming.</p> <p>“A shimming device is a paper-thin card size device with an embedded microchip and flash storage,” said Planos. “So they put these into the slot where you’re reading the chip side of your credit or debit card.”</p> <p>When consumers use the card, scammers then have their information – something Bradley said didn’t take her bank too long to notice.</p> <p>“It seemed like it was maybe around a week before they caught because they did it twice, and then I think on the second one, they were like ‘Wait a minute’,” said Bradley.</p> <p>“In a similar fashion, these apps have been created to give you a discount at the pump. Just scan this coupon and it’ll knock 15 cents per gallon off your tank of gas,” said Planos.</p> <p>Planos said a lot of these discounted gas apps are just there to steal personal information, but there are ways people can protect themselves.</p>



	<p>The BBB recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using a credit card instead of your debit card</li> <li>• Paying inside the gas station and not out</li> <li>• Read the reviews on apps you download</li> <li>• Keep up with the charges you make</li> </ul> <p>“And prepare yourself for the cyber activity and the scams that are frankly inevitable,” said Planos.</p> <p>Those who have fallen victim to a scam can file a report with the <a href="#">BBB Scam Tracker</a>.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Google provide Ukraine reliable, helpful info</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.scmp.com/tech/big-tech/article/3172337/google-chief-says-search-giant-working-provide-ukraine-reliable">https://www.scmp.com/tech/big-tech/article/3172337/google-chief-says-search-giant-working-provide-ukraine-reliable</a>
GIST	<p>Information technology companies are focused on providing reliable information and stymying Russian propaganda about the invasion of Ukraine, the CEO of <a href="#">Google</a> and Alphabet Inc said Tuesday.</p> <p>Sundar Pichai met with Poland’s Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki in Warsaw to discuss ways of aiding the people of war-torn Ukraine.</p> <p>“We are also working to make sure that trustworthy and helpful information gets to people through our products,” Pichai said after the meeting.</p> <p>That includes air raid alerts to Ukrainians as well as information about shelters and humanitarian aid. “We are also blocking channels and apps associated with Russia’s state-funded media,” Pichai said.</p> <p>Google has donated US\$35 million to humanitarian organizations working in Ukraine and is offering grants and fellowships for refugees and for Poland’s NGOs. Another US\$10 million will go to supporting civil society in Ukraine.</p> <p>Pichai and Morawiecki also held a remote meeting with the Prime Minister of Slovenia, Janez Jansa and with a representative of Covid-19-infected Czech premier, Petr Fiala. The three prime ministers met with Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv two weeks ago, to discuss best ways of offering support.</p> <p>Leaders of countries bordering Russia and Ukraine have appealed to the heads of big IT companies for help in fighting false information and in curbing Russian propaganda about the war.</p> <p>Morawiecki expressed his “personal thanks” to Pichai, for his “critical role” in spreading the truth at the time of war.</p> <p>“Russia is moving from autocracy to the totalitarian regime where the propaganda is so important,” Morawiecki said.</p> <p>This is why the role of Google and information platforms is “critically important in this war for freedom”, Morawiecki said. “Google is helping in this war for freedom (by) spreading the truth.”</p> <p>Pichai also met with Poland’s NGO humanitarian organizations and teams of Ukrainian start-ups.</p> <p>Some 2.3 million from the 4 million Ukrainian refugees have sought safety in Poland since the February 24 start of Russia’s invasion.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Cybercrooks reel from impact of sanctions</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.digitalshadows.com/blog-and-research/cybercriminals-reel-from-impact-of-sanctions/">https://www.digitalshadows.com/blog-and-research/cybercriminals-reel-from-impact-of-sanctions/</a>

Since [Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February](#), the Digital Shadows Photon team has been following multiple aspects of the tragic conflict and its impact on the cybersphere. We've explored [threat actors' initial responses to the war](#), shared advice on [how to plan a cyber response to the events](#), and investigated the [revival of hacktivism as a means to target Russian interests](#). Earlier in March, we looked into the potential for [Russian businesses and institutions to use cryptocurrency to bypass sanctions](#) introduced as punishment for Russia's actions. Now we've turned our attention to ways in which individual threat actors are feeling the impact of these punitive financial measures. During our research on Russian-speaking cybercriminal forums, we found instances of cybercriminals sharing stories of personal financial struggles, debates on how to store or transfer funds, and discussions about how to adapt malicious activity to ensure continuing profit in the new economic reality.

### STORING AND INVESTING FUNDS

Our visits to dark web forums revealed that many cybercriminal users' primary concern appears to be ensuring the safety and stability of funds held in Russia-based accounts – whether that's profits from illicit activity or personal, legitimate money. In a typical thread on a carding-focused cybercriminal forum, a user sought advice on what to do with dollars held in a Russian bank, noting that they could not deposit these funds into a cryptocurrency exchange or send the money to friends or relatives due to the large sums involved. This thread generated many responses from other forum members with suggestions and recommendations.

One user advised simply leaving the money where it was for six months, if the questioner did not need to use it urgently for other purposes. A different user mocked this suggestion, writing: "I hope you were joking about [holding the funds in rubles for] half a year? After half a year, your rubles will only be good for lighting a fire, they will not be good for anything else". The user also questioned whether the Russian state could be trusted to allow the purchase of dollars after six months, and worried that many Russian banks would go bankrupt. Other forum members considered the advisability of buying gold, although some noted that this method would incur losses due to the high trade fees and storage costs and would involve "an expensive examination" during the transaction process.

The safety of converting funds to cryptocurrency frequently crops up on Russian-language cybercriminal forums. A number of threat actors have raised concerns about [cryptocurrency-related organizations observing anti-Russia measures](#). In early March, members of one carding-focused forum shared links to media articles reporting that the cryptocurrency exchange Coinbase and the stablecoin Tether (USDT), a cryptocurrency whose value is pegged to the dollar, had announced their willingness to observe sanctions against Russia. One user described this move as "completely contrary to the ideology of crypto," while others cast around for alternative stablecoins. Users in another thread claimed that Tether has blocked more than 560 wallet addresses to date, wondering whether the company could target Russia-based users with specific restrictions. One forum member commented that "any stablecoin can be frozen," and another stated, "you can't deny blacklisting and blocking, it's simple." Others disagreed, arguing that Tether would not concern itself with "ordinary individuals who have deposited small sums." One threat actor even claimed that they had converted funds to Tether when the conflict began and had even made money on the conversion.

### TRANSFERRING FUNDS

We observed many forum users asking for recommendations on moving money to and from Russia in view of the economic sanctions introduced against the nation. In a typical thread on one prominent cybercriminal forum, multiple users suggested using cryptocurrency, with one member describing this as "the only reliable option left." A different user questioned the advisability of this route, noting the Russian Central Bank's repeated calls for a ban on cryptocurrency in the country. Other users recommended using various permutations of transfers to third-party countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States with fewer restrictions on transferring funds to Russia. Still others suggested named money transfer services, generating further requests for reviews of working with these platforms.

Another common suggestion involved opening accounts with online banking services before withdrawing cash from ATMs based in Russia. Users emphasized that these accounts could be topped up in multiple ways, including bank transfer and via cryptocurrency. However, other forum members highlighted recent

announcements from the payment card companies Visa and Mastercard about suspending operations in Russia, noting that new cards would no longer be issued to Russia-based individuals.

In a more charitable post on a different forum, a user sought ways to send money from Russia to Ukraine so that it could be withdrawn in cash, and also asked for ways to obtain virtual payment cards for Ukrainian refugees in Poland. They stated that transferring money internationally had become difficult since the money transfer services Western Union and Golden Crown had ceased operations in Russia. Responses to the thread from other users involved using various named cryptocurrencies to exchange for cash or using private banking services.

### **IMPACT ON MALICIOUS ACTIVITY**

While threat actors on cybercriminal forums are careful not to reveal too much about their personal tactics, techniques, and procedures—to avoid unwanted attention from law enforcement agencies and security researchers—we’ve observed forum users highlighting specific aspects of their malicious activity and seeking ways to mitigate barriers that sanctions have introduced.

For instance, soon after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine at the end of February, users of a high-profile cybercriminal forum began to wonder whether forum members seeking to trade on the platform should set prices or budgets in dollars or rubles, in view of the collapse in the ruble’s value due to punitive economic restrictions against Russia. One user opined, “It’s too late for that.” Another agreed, writing, “the exchange rate is totally terrible.” A different forum member said that the sanctions’ effects could be mitigated by living “in dollars,” advising: “just exchange [dollars for roubles] when you need to pay for something”.

Elsewhere, a member of a carding-focused forum highlighted the US Postal Service’s (USPS) decision to suspend international mail services to Russia because sanctions-related restrictions had reduced the availability of transportation to the area. Only diplomatic and military mail are excluded from this suspension. This is a matter of deep concern for carders, as transporting goods purchased using stolen payment card details forms a key part of the attack chain. The delivery companies UPS and FedEx also recently announced the temporary withdrawal of their Russian services, further restricting the options for threat actors who rely on international organizations to move their illicit goods around. Responses to the forum user concerned about USPS involved convoluted mechanisms to deliver goods to third-party countries with more favorable attitudes to Russia, or using alternative methods to transport the parcels to Russia from border nations.

In another example of sanctions impeding cybercriminal activity, a user on a prominent cybercriminal forum complained that they were experiencing issues with posting advertisements on Instagram. They explained that they had followed “all the principles” for ensuring a successful scam—taking into account the appearance and age of the account—but had been unable to successfully share a phishing post spoofing an unnamed bank. Another forum user shared excerpts from news articles covering Russian media watchdog Roskomnadzor’s decision to block Instagram in Russia for “discrimination against Russian media and information resources,” explaining the reason for the thread starter’s failure.

### **PERSONAL LIVES IMPACTED**

Much of the forum content we have observed so far has centered on how to minimize disruption to malicious activity and ensure maximum continuing profit throughout the conflict. Let’s turn now to another aspect of the restrictions: the effect that sanctions have had on individual cybercriminals’ personal lives. Threat actors typically keep things professional when operating on cybercriminal forums, giving away as little personal information as they can. Yet every so often, posts reveal flashes of humanity that remind us that real people live behind the anonymous usernames.

A user on one prominent forum created a different thread titled “What to do next?”, explaining that deliveries from Poland and Germany to the factory they worked at had ceased. The user described how the factory management had sent over 100 workers home until the “situation improves.” They highlighted that many of the workers have a family or loans to support, asking desperately, “What do I do now? Where do I earn money?” They added, “I just don’t see a way out.” User responses to the thread included

suggestions to work as a food delivery or parcel courier for Yandex, although some forum members doubted that Yandex would survive the restrictions introduced against Russia.

On a different forum, a Ukraine-based cybercriminal sought recommendations for a service to provide false documents for crossing the border out of Ukraine amid a ban on men aged 18-60 leaving the country. They pleaded, “the situation is getting worse every day.” A small number of forum members suggested convoluted methods involving driving to Moldova, feigning a business trip, or inventing a lost passport. However, the majority of respondents to the thread opined that the user would not be successful in their attempt to leave Ukraine. Several suggested that buying fake documents on the forum would be a waste of money as no one could guarantee what would happen at the border; many anticipated that EU border guards would detect fraudulent papers immediately, and others worried that those attempting the crossing would be shot. Most advised not taking unnecessary “risks,” predicting that there would be “clarity” in “a couple of weeks.”

## OUTLOOK

As the war in Ukraine continues and Western nations introduce increasingly punitive measures against Russia, we will likely see more cases of cybercriminals bemoaning the impact that restrictions may have on their malicious activity and looking for ways to get around the constraints. The general consensus among threat actors appears to be that one of the most damaging measures—cutting Russia off from the global Internet—is unlikely to occur due to the difficulties of actually implementing this measure in reality. However, Digital Shadows will continue to monitor cybercriminal chatter to see if threat actors change their tactics in response to measures introduced to punish Russia.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Video game hacked; \$625M crypto stolen</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/29/axie-infinity-cryptocurrency-hack/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/29/axie-infinity-cryptocurrency-hack/</a>
GIST	<p>In a brazen attack on popular video game Axie Infinity, hackers swiped \$625 million in cryptocurrency, the game company’s executives said Tuesday, marking one of the largest crypto-thefts to date amid rising rates of such crime.</p> <p>The theft occurred last Wednesday, according to the company, when hackers infiltrated part of Ronin, the underlying blockchain that powers the game. Developers at Sky Mavis, which runs both Axie Infinity and Ronin, said they only discovered the breach Tuesday.</p> <p>“There has been a security breach on the Ronin Network,” the company <a href="#">said</a> in a post in its newsletter. “We are working directly with various government agencies to ensure the criminals get brought to justice.”</p> <p>Representatives for Sky Mavis did not immediately return request for comment.</p> <p>Axie Infinity uses a “play-to-earn” system that combines finance and gaming, powered by NFTs, unique tokens that can be traced back to a user. Players buy creature-centric NFTs to gain entry into the game, and then spend more crypto to acquire and breed various beasts they can deploy in battles. The NFTs have both in-universe and real-world value, adding a kind of digital-money buzz to traditional gameplay.</p> <p>The blockchain is the public record of where cryptocurrency transactions take place, functioning as a financial nerve center.</p> <p>The Ronin hackers made off with some 174,000 ETH, the currency associated with the Ethereum blockchain, and nearly 26 million in USDC; collectively the two are currently worth about \$625 million. USDC is a stablecoin, which means its value is pegged to the U.S. dollar.</p> <p>Crypto hacks are becoming more common as the amount of trading activity increases. A <a href="#">hack of</a> the Bitmart platform in December resulted in a theft of nearly \$200 million in currency, while last summer a hacker hit Poly Network, which allows blockchains to work together, for a <a href="#">number exceeding \$600 million as well</a>, though eventually returned the money.</p>

Activists worry that the anonymity of the blockchain makes thievery easier; while all transactions are recorded there, it is often difficult to know who various addresses belong to.

Trading in Axie Infinity was frozen Tuesday in the wake of the hack, as [fans and experts](#) questioned whether the hack might make companies and players more skeptical of play-to-earn games.

Sky Mavis dismissed any concern the hack would disrupt its activities on Tuesday.

“We are here to stay,” the Axie Infinity Twitter account [posted](#) shortly after news of the hack broke.

The game has at times generated controversy because of its [high cost to play](#); the company has even launched a [“scholarship program”](#) that brings together devoted gamers who lack the money with people who have the funds but lack the skill or time.

Since tokens fluctuate in value, breaches can have an effect on trading. The crypto community on Tuesday was abuzz about the action of “Cobie,” an enigmatic crypto figure (real name: [Jordan Fish](#)). He [generated an intense back and forth on Twitter](#) when he said he had taken short positions on a large number of NFTs from the game last week because he perceived security flaws.

“I noticed that Axie bridge was exploited for \$600m 6 days ago, so I shorted AXS with high leverage,” he wrote in a post, as some they did the same while others lobbed questions at their statements.

It remains to be seen how much of Ronin’s hacked cryptocurrency will make it into general circulation. The conversion into traditional, or fiat, currency is considered one of the major hurdles for would-be crypto thieves, who struggle to obtain real-world dollars without catching the eye of investigators. Such realities over time could deter hackers, as they realize stealing the money is only half of the battle.

Last month, a New York couple was [arrested and charged with money laundering](#) after they tried to convert some of the billions from an infamous 2016 hack into real-world currency, helping to lead investigators to them.

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HEADLINE	03/29 Fake subpoena emergency data requests
SOURCE	<a href="https://krebsonsecurity.com/2022/03/hackers-gaining-power-of-subpoena-via-fake-emergency-data-requests/">https://krebsonsecurity.com/2022/03/hackers-gaining-power-of-subpoena-via-fake-emergency-data-requests/</a>
GIST	<p>There is a terrifying and highly effective “method” that criminal hackers are now using to harvest sensitive customer data from Internet service providers, phone companies and social media firms. It involves compromising email accounts and websites tied to police departments and government agencies, and then sending unauthorized demands for subscriber data while claiming the information being requested can’t wait for a court order because it relates to an urgent matter of life and death.</p> <p>In the United States, when federal, state or local law enforcement agencies wish to obtain information about who owns an account at a social media firm, or what Internet addresses a specific cell phone account has used in the past, they must submit an official court-ordered warrant or subpoena.</p> <p>Virtually all major technology companies serving large numbers of users online have departments that routinely review and process such requests, which are typically granted as long as the proper documents are provided and the request appears to come from an email address connected to an actual police department domain name.</p> <p>But in certain circumstances — such as a case involving imminent harm or death — an investigating authority may make what’s known as an <b>Emergency Data Request</b> (EDR), which largely bypasses any official review and does not require the requestor to supply any court-approved documents.</p> <p>It is now clear that some hackers have figured out there is no quick and easy way for a company that receives one of these EDRs to know whether it is legitimate. Using their illicit access to police email</p>

systems, the hackers will send a fake EDR along with an attestation that innocent people will likely suffer greatly or die unless the requested data is provided immediately.

In this scenario, the receiving company finds itself caught between two unsavory outcomes: Failing to immediately comply with an EDR — and potentially having someone’s blood on their hands — or possibly leaking a customer record to the wrong person.

“We have a legal process to compel production of documents, and we have a streamlined legal process for police to get information from ISPs and other providers,” said **Mark Rasch**, a former prosecutor with the **U.S. Department of Justice**.

“And then we have this emergency process, almost like you see on [the television series] *Law & Order*, where they say they need certain information immediately,” Rasch continued. “Providers have a streamlined process where they publish the fax or contact information for police to get emergency access to data. But there’s no real mechanism defined by most Internet service providers or tech companies to test the validity of a search warrant or subpoena. And so as long as it looks right, they’ll comply.”

To make matters more complicated, there are tens of thousands of police jurisdictions around the world — including roughly [18,000 in the United States alone](#) — and all it takes for hackers to succeed is illicit access to a single police email account.

### THE LAPSUS\$ CONNECTION

The reality that teenagers are now impersonating law enforcement agencies to subpoena privileged data on their targets at whim is evident in the dramatic backstory behind **LAPSUS\$**, the data extortion group that [recently hacked into some of the world’s most valuable technology companies](#), including **Microsoft**, **Okta**, **NVIDIA** and **Vodafone**.

In [a blog post](#) about their recent hack, Microsoft said LAPSUS\$ succeeded against its targets through a combination of low-tech attacks, mostly involving old-fashioned social engineering — such as bribing employees at or contractors for the target organization.

“Other tactics include phone-based social engineering; [SIM-swapping](#) to facilitate account takeover; accessing personal email accounts of employees at target organizations; paying employees, suppliers, or business partners of target organizations for access to credentials and multi-factor authentication (MFA) approval; and intruding in the ongoing crisis-communication calls of their targets,” Microsoft wrote of LAPSUS\$.

Researchers from security firms [Unit 221B](#) and [Palo Alto Networks](#) say that prior to launching LAPSUS\$, the group’s leader “White” (a.k.a. “WhiteDoxbin,” “Oklaqq”) was a founding member of a cybercriminal group calling itself the “[Recursion Team](#).” This group specialized in SIM swapping targets of interest and participating in “[swatting](#)” attacks, wherein fake bomb threats, hostage situations and other violent scenarios are phoned in to police as part of a scheme to trick them into visiting potentially deadly force on a target’s address.

The founder of the Recursion Team was a then 14-year-old from the United Kingdom who used the handle “**Everlynn**.” On April 5, 2021, Everlynn posted a new sales thread to the cybercrime forum cracked[.]to titled, “Warrant/subpoena service (get law enforcement data from any service).” The price: \$100 to \$250 per request.

“Services [include] Apple, Snapchat, Google (more expensive), not doing Discord, basically any site mostly,” read Everlynn’s ad, which was posted by the user account “InfinityRecursion.”

A month prior on Cracked, Everlynn posted a sales thread, “1x Government Email Account || BECOME A FED!,” which advertised the ability to send email from a federal agency within the government of Argentina.



“I would like to sell a government email that can be used for subpoena for many companies such as Apple, Uber, Instagram, etc.,” Everlynn’s sales thread explained, setting the price at \$150. “You can breach users and get private images from people on SnapChat like nudes, go hack your girlfriend or something haha. You won’t get the login for the account, but you’ll basically obtain everything in the account if you play your cards right. I am not legally responsible if you mishandle this. This is very illegal and you will get raided if you don’t use a vpn. You can also breach into the government systems for this, and find LOTS of more private data and sell it for way, way more.”

Last week, the **BBC** reported that authorities in the United Kingdom [had detained seven individuals aged 16 to 21](#) in connection with LAPSUS\$.

### **TAKING ON THE DOXBIN**

It remains unclear whether White or Everlynn were among those detained; U.K. police declined to name the suspects. But White’s real-life identity became public recently after he crossed the wrong people.

The de-anonymization of the LAPSUS\$ leader began late last year after he purchased a website called **Doxbin**, a long-running and highly toxic online community that is used to “dox” or post deeply personal information on people.

Based on the feedback posted by Doxbin members, White was not a particularly attentive administrator. Longtime members soon took to harassing him about various components of the site falling into disrepair. That pestering eventually prompted White to sell Doxbin back to its previous owner at a considerable loss. But before doing so, White leaked the Doxbin user database.

White’s leak triggered a swift counterpunch from Doxbin’s staff, which naturally responded by posting on White perhaps the most thorough dox the forum had ever produced.

KrebsOnSecurity recently interviewed the past and current owner of the Doxbin — an established hacker who goes by the handle “[KT](#).” According to KT, it is becoming more common for hackers to use EDRs for stalking, hacking, harassing and publicly humiliating others.

KT shared several recent examples of fraudulent EDRs obtained by hackers who bragged about their success with the method.

“Terroristic threats with a valid reason to believe somebody’s life is in danger is usually the go-to,” KT said, referring to the most common attestation that accompanies a fake EDR.

One of the phony EDRs shared by KT targeted an 18-year-old from Indiana, and was sent to the social media platform **Discord** earlier this year. The document requested the Internet address history of Discord accounts tied to a specific phone number used by the target. Discord complied with the request.

“Discord replies to EDRs in 30 minutes to one hour with the provided information,” KT claimed.

Asked about the validity of the unauthorized EDR shared by KT, Discord said the request came from a legitimate law enforcement account that was later determined to have been compromised.

“We can confirm that Discord received requests from a legitimate law enforcement domain and complied with the requests in accordance with our policies,” Discord said in a written statement. “We verify these requests by checking that they come from a genuine source, and did so in this instance. While our verification process confirmed that the law enforcement account itself was legitimate, we later learned that it had been compromised by a malicious actor. We have since conducted an investigation into this illegal activity and notified law enforcement about the compromised email account.”

KT said fake EDRs don’t have to come from police departments based in the United States, and that some people in the community of those sending fake EDRs are hacking into police department emails by first



compromising the agency's website. From there, they can drop a backdoor "shell" on the server to secure permanent access, and then create new email accounts within the hacked organization.

In other cases, KT said, hackers will try to guess the passwords of police department email systems. In these attacks, the hackers will identify email addresses associated with law enforcement personnel, and then attempt to authenticate using passwords those individuals have used at other websites that have been breached previously.

"A lot of governments overseas are using WordPress, and I know a kid on Telegram who has multiple shells on gov sites," KT said. "It's near impossible to get U.S. dot-govs nowadays, although I've seen a few people with it. Most govts use [Microsoft] Outlook, so it's more difficult because there's usually some sort of multi-factor authentication. But not all have it."

According to KT, Everlynn and White recently had a falling out, with White paying KT to publish a dox on Everlynn and to keep it pinned to the site's home page. That dox states that Everlynn is a 15-year-old from the United Kingdom who has used a variety of monikers over the past year alone, including "**Miku**" and "**Anitsu**."

KT said Everlynn's dox is accurate, and that the youth has been arrested multiple times for issuing fake EDRs. But KT said each time Everlynn gets released from police custody, they go right back to committing the same cybercrimes.

"Anitsu (Miku, Everlynn), an old staff member of Doxbin, was arrested probably 4-5 months ago for jacking government emails used for EDR'ing," KT said. "White and him are not friends anymore though. White paid me a few weeks ago to pin his dox on Doxbin. Also, White had planned to use EDRs against me, due to a bet we had planned; dox for dox, winner gets 1 coin."

#### **A FUNDAMENTALLY UNFIXABLE PROBLEM?**

**Nicholas Weaver**, a security specialist and lecturer at the **University of California, Berkeley**, said one big challenge to combating fraudulent EDRs is that there is fundamentally no notion of global online identity.

"The only way to clean it up would be to have the FBI act as the sole identity provider for all state and local law enforcement," Weaver said. "But even that won't necessarily work because how does the FBI vet in real time that some request is really from some podunk police department?"

It's not clear that the FBI would be willing or able to take on such a task. In November 2021, KrebsOnSecurity broke the news that hackers sent a fake email alert to thousands of state and local law enforcement entities through the FBI's **Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal (LEEP)**. In that attack, the intruders abused a [fairly basic and dangerous coding error on the website](#), and the fake emails all came from a real **fbi.gov** address.

KrebsOnSecurity asked the FBI whether it had any indication that its own systems were used for unauthorized EDRs. The FBI declined to answer that question, but confirmed it was aware of different schemes involving phony EDRs targeting both the public and the agency's private sector partners.

"We take these reports seriously and vigorously pursue them," reads a written statement shared by the FBI. "Visit [this page](#) for tips and resources to verify the information you are receiving. If you believe you are a victim of an emergency data request scheme, please report to [www.ic3.gov](http://www.ic3.gov) or contact your local FBI field office."

Rasch said while service providers need more rigorous vetting mechanisms for all types of legal requests, getting better at spotting unauthorized EDRs would require these companies to somehow know and validate the names of every police officer in the United States.

“One of the problems you have is there’s no validated master list of people who are authorized to make that demand,” Rasch said. “And that list is going to change all the time. But even then, the entire system is only as secure as the least secure individual police officer email account.”

The idea of impersonating law enforcement officers to obtain information typically only available via search warrant or subpoena is hardly new. A fictionalized example appeared in the second season of the hit television show **Mr. Robot**, wherein the main character Elliot [pretends to be a police officer to obtain location data in real time from a cellular phone company](#).

Weaver said what probably keeps fraudulent EDRs from being more common is that most people in the criminal hacking community perceive it as too risky. This is supported by the responses in discussion threads across multiple hacking forums where members sought out someone to perform an EDR on their behalf.

“It’s highly risky if you get caught,” Weaver said. “But doing this is not a matter of skill. It’s one of will. It’s a fundamentally unfixable problem without completely redoing how we think about identity on the Internet on a national scale.”

The current situation with fraudulent EDRs illustrates the dangers of relying solely on email to process legal requests for highly sensitive subscriber data. In July 2021, a bipartisan group of U.S. senators introduced new legislation to combat the growing use of counterfeit court orders by scammers and criminals. The bill calls for funding for state and tribal courts to adopt widely available digital signature technology that meets standards developed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

“Forged court orders, usually involving copy-and-pasted signatures of judges, have been used to authorize illegal wiretaps and fraudulently take down legitimate reviews and websites by those seeking to conceal negative information and past crimes,” the lawmakers said in a statement introducing their bill.

The [Digital Authenticity for Court Orders Act](#) would require federal, state and tribal courts to use a digital signature for orders authorizing surveillance, domain seizures and removal of online content.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 CISA: internet UPS devices face attacks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cisa-warns-of-attacks-targeting-internet-connected-ups-devices/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cisa-warns-of-attacks-targeting-internet-connected-ups-devices/</a>
GIST	<p>In a joint advisory with the Department of Energy, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) warned U.S. organizations today to secure Internet-connected UPS devices from ongoing attacks.</p> <p>UPS devices are regularly used as emergency power backup solutions in mission-critical environments, including data centers, industrial facilities, server rooms, and hospitals.</p> <p>They're also connected to the Internet to allow admins to perform various remote tasks such as power monitoring and routine maintenance, which also exposes them to attacks.</p> <p>"The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and the Department of Energy are aware of threat actors gaining access to a variety of internet-connected uninterruptible power supply (UPS) devices, often through unchanged default usernames and passwords," the federal agencies <a href="#">said</a>.</p> <p>"Organizations can mitigate attacks against their UPS devices, which provide emergency power in a variety of applications when normal power sources are lost, by removing management interfaces from the internet."</p> <p><b>How to block the attacks</b></p> <p>Recommended mitigation measures include finding all UPSs and other emergency power systems on orgs' networks and ensuring they're not reachable over the Internet.</p>

	<p>If connecting their management interfaces to the Internet cannot be avoided, admins are advised <a href="#">[PDF]</a> to put the devices behind a virtual private network (VPN), enable multifactor authentication (MFA), and strong passwords or passphrases to hinder brute-forcing attempts.</p> <p>The recommendations also include checking that the UPSs are not using factory default credentials to attackers' attempts to use them and take over the targeted devices.</p> <p>U.S. organizations are also urged to implement login timeout/lockout policies to block these ongoing attacks against UPSs and similar systems.</p> <p>Besides default credentials, threat actors can also use critical security vulnerabilities to enable remote takeovers of uninterruptible power supply (UPS) devices and allow them to burn them out or disable power remotely.</p> <p>For instance, a set of <a href="#">critical zero-day vulnerabilities tracked as TLStorm</a> exploitable remotely by unauthenticated attackers without user interaction are known to impact SmartConnect and Smart-UPS devices from APC, a subsidiary of Schneider Electric.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Financial industry faces nation-state attacks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/critical-infrastructure/financial-institutions-face-cyberattacks-from-nation-states-actors-amid-political-turmoil">https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/critical-infrastructure/financial-institutions-face-cyberattacks-from-nation-states-actors-amid-political-turmoil</a>
GIST	<p>As open war rages in Ukraine, the long-promised <a href="#">cyberattacks from Russia</a> are also striking U.S. financial industry targets.</p> <p>A <a href="#">report released Monday</a> examining how IT security executives view nation-state bad actors and how they attack organizations in other countries.</p> <p>The study by cybersecurity service provider Trellix in partnership with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), based on a survey of more than 800 IT security professionals globally, found that 86% of respondents believe they have been targeted by a cyberattack conducted by <a href="#">a group acting on behalf of a nation-state</a>. And just over one-quarter of respondents (27%) say that they have complete confidence in the ability of their organization to differentiate between nation-state cyberattacks and other cyberattacks.</p> <p>Only 1 out of 10 surveyed organizations do not have a cybersecurity strategy. However, 90% of respondents say that the government “should do more to support organizations and protect critical infrastructure against state-backed cyberattacks,” according to the report.</p> <p>More than 90% also said they were willing to share information publicly when they faced a nation-state cyberattack, but not always with full details of the attack or its effect.</p> <p><b>Russia, China most likely suspected to be behind nation-state cyberattacks</b></p> <p>Not surprisingly, the Trellix-CSIS report found Russia and China among the most likely suspects of launching a successful cyberattack resulting in data loss, service disruption, and industrial espionage, which might lead to significant costs to financial organizations attacked.</p> <p>“As geopolitical tensions rise, the likelihood of nation-state cyberattacks rises, as well,” Bryan Palma, CEO of Trellix, said in a press release. “Cybersecurity talent shortages, outdated IT infrastructure, and remote work are the greatest challenges in today’s operating environment. Organizations must improve their automation, remediation, and resiliency capabilities to defend against increasingly sophisticated attacks.”</p>

<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>Enterprises are concerned with the potential attacks from nation-state actors, as well as well-funded cybercrime rings. According to the Trellix survey, 92% of business respondents have experienced or may have experienced a nation-state backed cyberattack in the last 18 months or expect to face one in the future. The average nation-state-backed cyberattack costs an enterprise an estimated \$1.6 million per incident.</p> <p>Just one-third (33%) of companies surveyed by Trellix actually disclosed breach information to their customers. Survey respondents believe personally identifiable information (PII) related to either their customers or employees (46% and 40%, respectively) might be misused by bad actors. In addition, 92% of organizations interviewed said that they would share information about a cyberattack. And 9 out of 10 enterprises think the government should do more to offer cybersecurity protection.</p> <p>Ninety percent of respondents think the government should do more to support and protect critical infrastructure from cyberattacks. In the U.S., programs like the Cyber Safety Review Board, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency’s Shield Up, and the White House’s new Office of the National Cyber Director are examples of programs governments worldwide should continue to develop to help protect critical infrastructure.</p> <p>“Nation-states and their criminal proxies are some of the most dangerous cyber attackers because they are capable, best resourced and extremely persistent,” said James Lewis, senior vice president and director, strategic technologies program for CSIS, said in a press release.</p> <p>“It’s not surprising that nation-states, particularly China and Russia, are behind many of the cyberattacks organizations experience,” Lewis says. “What is surprising is that 86% of respondents in this survey believe they have been targeted by a group acting on behalf of a nation-state, and only 27% are completely confident in their organization’s ability to recognize such an attack in contrast to other cyberattacks.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Code bug behind Mazda Infotainment crash</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/mazda-infotainment-crash-shows-how-fragile-car-security-really-is/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/mazda-infotainment-crash-shows-how-fragile-car-security-really-is/</a>
GIST	<p>Another day, another crash in automotive device software.</p> <p>This time, the bug was found in the infotainment system of older model Mazdas from 2014-2017. Drivers reported that their HD radio receivers crashed when connecting to a local radio station. The radio and its display, bluetooth capabilities, built-in maps, and digital clocks were all fried.</p> <p>According to <a href="#">reports</a>, the system failure occurred due to a simple coding error that transpired when the radio station transmitted images without the required extension in the file names.</p> <p>While frustrated Mazda owners waiting for their new \$1500 CMU (Connectivity Master Unit) might disagree, this particular bug was relatively harmless – resulting in minimal damage.</p> <p>Unfortunately, chances are we’ll continue to hear reports of software breakdowns in vehicle systems, and as <a href="#">vehicles increasingly rely on code</a>, risks of vulnerabilities affecting security and safety grow exponentially. Who knows how the next bug will impact drivers?</p> <p><b>How a Simple Coding Error Corrupted Mazda’s Connected Systems</b></p> <p>The complete details of the coding error that led to the crash of Mazda CMUs weren’t published, but we can assume that it was a type of NULL dereference vulnerability.</p> <p>Here’s how that works:</p> <p>In the C programming language, there is a function called strchr. This function receives two parameters: a pointer to a string and a character, and tries to find the character within the string, returning a pointer to the result found. If the function fails, a NULL pointer is returned.</p>

Then, the program will probably try to understand the extension of the specific file that it received.

In order to find the extension, a function similar to strcmp is probably used. This function receives two pointers and compares their contents. Eventually, the comparison is made through a dereferencing pointer.

Dereferencing is the action of taking the value that the pointer is pointing at.

In this specific case, the NULL pointer was sent to this function, and while the function tried to dereference the value of the NULL, it got an exception.

This type of vulnerability in the code can be easily avoided by checking if the received pointer is different from NULL.

### **Prevention and Mitigation**

Preventing this type of issue in the development stage requires software engineers to follow secure coding standards that define how to write code in order to avoid security vulnerabilities in device software.

However, while secure coding is key to preventing software vulnerabilities, it's only one factor.

Coding will always be prone to human errors, even when written by the most experienced programmers. On top of that, most of the products we rely on today rely heavily on a supply chain that includes open source and third-party software that your programmers had no part in writing.

### **Smart Cars Need Smarter Security**

Car manufacturers are investing heavily in sophisticated automated safety controls, from steering and brakes to blind-spot detection and everything in between. Considering the fact that these systems have become increasingly reliant on software, why isn't the same attention directed at [automotive software security](#)?

The cost of a software vulnerability in automotive devices skyrockets if it is discovered after the car hits the road. Beyond the price of pausing production or issuing recalls, software bugs could result in more than the inconvenience of a broken infotainment system. When found in critical safety features, they could actually affect human lives.

Insufficient attention to [software security in automotive devices](#) can turn cars into ticking time bombs. Today's heavily automated cars demand OEMs extend their focus beyond physical car safety to include software security, from the earliest design stages all the way to tracking software versions that are already on the road.

### **The Road to Automotive Safety: Secure Software**

Ensuring safe and vulnerability-free automotive devices requires additional steps beyond secure coding or manual bug tracking. That's why firmware and code in all devices should be continuously monitored for vulnerabilities, to quickly detect and fix errors. Automated product security helps teams address security risks before – not after – they land companies in the headlines.

An advanced automotive product security platform, like [Cybellum](#), enables product security teams to track every single line of code in their software – whether it was created in-house or obtained from a third-party or open source – and ensure that software vulnerabilities are detected and addressed early, before they can cause costly injury to people and serious damage to manufacturers' reputations.

The Mazda infotainment crash proves once again that a simple coding error can cause unforeseen mayhem. Luckily, this time, the damage was limited to infotainment and temporarily frustrated drivers plus a few headlines. Car manufacturers need to start prioritizing device security to ensure all the software their products rely on doesn't drive them off the road.

HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Lapsus\$ claims IT giant Globant hack, leak</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://thehackernews.com/2022/03/lapsus-claims-to-have-breached-it-firm.html">https://thehackernews.com/2022/03/lapsus-claims-to-have-breached-it-firm.html</a>
GIST	<p>The LAPSUS\$ data extortion gang announced their return on Telegram after a week-long "vacation," leaking what they claim is data from software services company Globant.</p> <p>"We are officially back from a vacation," the group wrote on their Telegram channel – which has nearly around 54,000 members as of writing – posting images of extracted data and credentials belonging to the company's DevOps infrastructure.</p> <p>The screenshots depict a folder listing for what appears to be different companies from across the world, including Arcserve, Banco Galicia, BNP Paribas Cardif, Citibanamex, DHL, Facebook, Stifel, among others.</p> <p>Also shared is a torrent file purported to contain around 70GB of Globant's source code as well as administrator passwords associated with the firm's Atlassian suite, including Confluence and Jira, and the Crucible code review tool.</p> <p>As malware research group <a href="#">VX-Underground</a> points out, the passwords are not only easily guessable, but they have also been reused multiple times, prompting LAPSUS\$ to call out the "poor security practices in use" at the company. We have reached out to Globant for comment and we will update the story if we hear back.</p> <p>The LAPSUS\$ extortion group, since their emergence in December 2021, have been in the spotlight for their <a href="#">headline-grabbing hacks</a> on Impresa, NVIDIA, Samsung, Vodafone, Ubisoft, Microsoft, and Okta.</p> <p>The latest data heist arrives as The City of London Police said it <a href="#">arrested and released</a> seven alleged operatives of the criminal cartel aged between 16 and 21 under investigation last week. But if the latest leak is any indication, the law enforcement actions have not put a stop to their operations.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Hackers use Conti ransomware on Russia</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/featured/hackers-turn-conti-ransomware-against-russia-as-twitter-suspends-some-anonymous-accounts/">https://www.hstoday.us/featured/hackers-turn-conti-ransomware-against-russia-as-twitter-suspends-some-anonymous-accounts/</a>
GIST	<p>Some Twitter accounts belonging to Anonymous hackers engaging in #OpRussia cyber operations against Russian targets have been suspended by the company as the collective continues to report new takedowns and data breaches — and one hacking group said it used ransomware from a notorious pro-Russia group against a Russian entity.</p> <p>On Saturday, one Anonymous account cited four others who had been suspended within the previous 24 hours. All were still suspended today. "We the people ask @TwitterSupport, @Twitter, @TwitterSafety, Which Side Are You On?" the account added.</p> <p>"Twitter is beginning to censor #Anonymous accounts and is keeping accounts of those enjoying the lost lives of innocent children, barbarically massacred by Putin's murderous machine," tweeted one prominent Anonymous account. "Enough is Enough! Stop Censorship!"</p> <p>"There are activist accounts being suspended by @twitter b/c of leaked info about Russia. Twitter is a company based in the USA. There is no point in censoring our activism targeting a country engaged in war crimes against Ukraine. Russia also is CENSORING Twitter," tweeted an Anonymous account with nearly 8 million followers.</p> <p>"Despite Twitter censoring various activists because of data leaks, #Anonymous will be vigilant in our continuation of smashing Russian government servers until Russian troops leave Ukraine," the account also tweeted.</p>



One of the blocked accounts resurfaced under another account name, tweeting, “Twitter censors us for our Anti-War anti-corruption stance. We are on #OperationRussia and twitter has decided to block our Anonymous account. They prefer to give voice to the propaganda of the RUSSIAN government!”

“The only thing that twitter reproaches us for is actively supporting Ukraine,” the account stated in another tweet.

Hacking group Network Battalion 65 (NB65), affiliated with Anonymous, claimed the breach of VGTRK (All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company) and 870GB worth of swiped data. That is expected to be leaked soon on the site DDoSecrets, which has published many of Anonymous and affiliates’ data dumps including a recent posting of nearly 140,000 emails from the Russian firm MashOil.

“It’s going to take YEARS for journalists, researchers and the general public to go through all the Russian data that’s being leaked in response to the invasion of Ukraine,” tweeted Emma Best of DDoSecrets.

NB65 said Monday that they hacked JSC (Joint Stock Company) Mosexpertiza. “We’ve compromised your network environment completely,” NB65 said in an open message to JSC Mosexpertiza. “Not sorry. By now it’s probably painfully apparent that you’ve also been infected by a crypto locking ransomware variant. Spoiler, it’s Conti’s.”

Early in the #OpRussia campaign, hackers went after the pro-Russia Conti ransomware group, leaking internal chats and files from the group. That offensive action may have been what prompted an update on the Conti threat from DHS’ Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, warning stakeholders that “Conti cyber threat actors remain active” and the group is targeting U.S. and international organizations.

“Be sure to tell them thank you for us,” NB65 continued. “We’ve modified it in a way that will prevent you from decrypting your files with their decryptor. We’ve taken 450GB of your data including all emails, internal documents and financials. There will be no negotiations. Talk to your President about it. Encourage him to get the fuck out of Ukraine. The longer your military is active there, the longer we will continue to fuck your shit up.”

Similarly, in their message to VGTRK, NB65 said the swiped data is “off the table for negotiation.”

“We’re watching you very closely and are prepared for your eventual incident response,” NB65 said. “Your blue team kind of sucks. Hard to find good IT help when all your techies are fleeing the country, eh? Your President should not have committed war crimes. If you’re seeking someone to blame for your current situation look no further than Vladimir Putin.”

Anonymous hackers posted late last week a 28GB leak of data they said was taken from the Central Bank of the Russian Federation. “We distributed these documents to various points of the internet,” tweeted the account Anonymous Rabbit. “If the links are censored, we will share them on different links.”

“Vladimir Putin, no secret is safe. We are everywhere. We are in your palace. We are where you eat. We are at your table. We are in the room where you sleep,” said an accompanying video. “Now we share thousands of documents belonging to the Central Bank of Russia — agreements, correspondence, money transfers, trade secrets of your oligarchs, real economy reports that you keep from the public, trade agreements you have signed with other countries, declarations, information of your registered supporters, your conference videos, and the programs you use.”

Operations against companies operating in Russia have continued, with Anonymous claiming the takedown of the Russian sites of French retailers Auchan, home improvement chain Leroy Merlin, and sporting goods chain Decathlon. A 10GB database that hackers said was from Nestle was posted online a week ago. Anonymous accounts continued to circulate names of companies refusing to scale back operations or exit Russia.



	<p>“We wanted to give proof to our community that the supposed unbreakable security of Russia does not exist, they have a vulnerability from 2015 lolol even my mother has better security on her devices,” tweeted Anonymous account Cyber Ninja Security Team along with a screenshot of a hack.</p> <p>“Anonymous is not the enemy of citizens of Russia. We are you. We are among you. We call upon Russian citizens to demand your government to end this aggression in Ukraine. We urge Russian Federation, stop this war,” stated one Anonymous video. “Operation Russia will continue until peace is established in Ukraine... Operation Russia will end up in history.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Ukraine suffered hacks into Russia invasion</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/03/30/ukraine-suffered-two-cyberattacks-lead-up-russia-invasion/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/03/30/ukraine-suffered-two-cyberattacks-lead-up-russia-invasion/</a>
GIST	<p><b>New research sheds light on two early hacks in Ukraine cyber conflict</b> Cyberattacks have taken <a href="#">a backseat</a> in Russia's invasion of Ukraine, at least so far.</p> <p><b>But in the days before the conflict began, Ukraine was the target of two significant cyberattacks, detailed in new research out today.</b> Both affected Ukraine's government agencies and one of them also impacted its military and civilians.</p> <p><b>Example No. 1: Viasat</b> <b>Hackers took down the U.S. satellite Internet firm Viasat starting Feb. 24, as Russia began invading Ukraine.</b> Viasat has released a new <a href="#">overview</a> that details the timeline of the “multifaceted and deliberate cyberattack” on its European satellite network, KA-SAT.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cyberattack affected Ukraine’s military, government agencies and civilians, Ukrainian authorities have said. Viasat uses European distributors to sell Internet service to customers, who use modems.</li> <li>• <b>Ukrainian modems and equipment began sending “high volumes of focused, malicious traffic” in the morning hours of Feb. 24,</b> Viasat said. “This targeted denial of service attack made it difficult for many modems to remain online,” the company said. “We believe the purpose of the attack was to interrupt service.”</li> </ul> <p><b>U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded that hackers working for Russia’s military intelligence agency were behind the attack,</b> my colleague Ellen Nakashima <a href="#">reported</a> last week. Viasat has said an investigation with Mandiant, law enforcement, government agencies and others is ongoing.</p> <p>Viasat also says it detected a “ground-based network intrusion by an attacker” that got into a key part of the KA-SAT network after “exploiting a misconfiguration in a VPN appliance.” The attacker then told “a large number of residential modems” to overwrite their data, making them unable to connect to the network.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>More of Viasat's response:</b> “Certain end-customer modems promptly received over-the-air updates, but where such updates are insufficient to timely restore functionality, new modems are being provided as the most efficient way to restore service,” the company said. “Viasat has already shipped tens of thousands of replacement modems to distributors and is ready to ship additional modems as needed.”</li> </ul> <p><a href="#">The report</a> comes around two weeks after CISA and the FBI warned satellite communication providers that hacks of their networks “could create risk in SATCOM network providers’ customer environments.”</p> <p><b>Example No. 2: “Whispergate”</b> CrowdStrike researchers say a group called “Ember Bear” was behind malware dubbed “Whispergate,” which targeted Ukrainian government agencies in the run-up to the invasion.</p> <p>Advertisement</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The group is “an adversary group that has operated against government and military organizations in Eastern Europe since early 2021,” CrowdStrike head of intelligence <b>Adam Meyers</b> plans to tell the <a href="#">House Homeland Security Committee</a> today.</li> </ul> <p><b>CrowdStrike hasn’t said the Russian government is behind the group. But its technical characteristics and intent “are consistent with other GRU cyber operations,”</b> Meyers said, referring to Russia’s military intelligence agency.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“We believe that they were initially engaged in collecting intelligence from various networks and they were basically motivated to weaponize that access and data during their intrusions to support information operations, so leaking things out in order to kind of create mistrust in public institutions and degrade the government's ability to counter Russian cyber operations,” Meyers told me.</li> </ul> <p><b>The new details could provide insight for cyber pros who have to defend their networks from Russian hackers.</b></p> <p>Russian hackers have increased their scanning of U.S. networks over the past month, FBI Cyber Division assistant director <b>Bryan Vorndran</b> told the House Judiciary Committee on Tuesday.</p> <p>“We have absolute strategic warning that Russia plans to hit us,” Vorndran said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 FBI: credential phishing of election officials</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fbi-warns-election-officials-of-credential-phishing-attacks/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fbi-warns-election-officials-of-credential-phishing-attacks/</a>
GIST	<p>The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) warned US election officials on Tuesday of an ongoing and widespread phishing campaign trying to steal their credentials since at least October 2021.</p> <p>"If successful, this activity may provide cyber actors with sustained, undetected access to a victim's systems," the FBI said in a private industry notification <a href="#">[PDF]</a>.</p> <p>"As of October 2021, US election officials in at least nine states received invoice-themed phishing emails containing links to websites intended to steal login credentials."</p> <p>This is likely a concerted effort to target US election officials, given that the phishing emails share similar attachment files, use compromised email addresses, and were sent during the same period in time.</p> <p>As the FBI further revealed, the attackers used various methods to redirect their targets to phishing landing pages designed to trick the recipients into entering their login credentials.</p> <p>The threat actors used compromised email accounts belonging to US government officials and email addresses spoofing US businesses.</p> <p>The FBI highlighted three different waves of phishing emails targeting election officials, using various tactics to trick them into handing over their credentials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On 5 October 2021, unidentified cyber actors targeted US election officials in at least nine states, and representatives of the National Association of Secretaries of State, with phishing emails. These emails originated from at least two email addresses with the same attachment titled, "INVOICE INQUIRY.PDF," which redirected users to a credential-harvesting website. One of the email addresses sending the phishing emails was a compromised US government official's email account.</li> <li>On 18 October 2021, cyber actors used two email addresses, purportedly from US businesses, to send phishing emails to county election employees. Both emails contained Microsoft Word document attachments regarding invoices, which redirected users to unidentified online credential harvesting websites.</li> <li>On 19 October 2021, cyber actors used an email address, purportedly from a US business, to send a phishing email containing fake invoices to an election official. The emails contained an attached Microsoft Word document titled, "Current Invoice and Payments for report."</li> </ul>

### Mitigations to lower the risk of compromise

The US federal law enforcement agency believes the threat actors behind this phishing campaign will likely continue or increase attacks against US election officials with new phishing emails as the 2022 midterm elections are closing in.

Network defenders are advised to educate email users such as the election officials targeted in these attacks on how to identify phishing, social engineering, and spoofing attempts and always confirm requests for sensitive info—including credentials—through secondary channels.

They're also urged to implement protocols to allow election officials and employees to report suspicious emails and require multi-factor authentication (MFA) on webmail, virtual private networks, and services that can be used to access critical systems.

As CISA previously said, state-sponsored hackers successfully [compromised and breached US elections support systems](#) by chaining together VPN and the Windows security flaws.

However, as CISA explained, it found no evidence that the APT actors were able to use their access to compromise the "integrity of elections data."

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Hackers crippled Viasat modems still active</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/exclusive-hackers-who-crippled-viasat-modems-ukraine-are-still-active-company-2022-03-30/">https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/exclusive-hackers-who-crippled-viasat-modems-ukraine-are-still-active-company-2022-03-30/</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON, March 30 (Reuters) - Hackers who crippled tens of thousands of satellite modems in Ukraine and across Europe are still trying to hobble U.S. telecommunications company Viasat as it works to bring its users back online, a company official told Reuters.</p> <p>Viasat Inc has been working to recover after a cyberattack remotely disabled satellite modems just as Russian forces pushed into Ukraine in the early hours of Feb. 24. The official said a parallel attack was launched at almost exactly the same time and used "high volumes of focused, malicious traffic" to try and overwhelm Viasat's network and was still ongoing.</p> <p>"We're still witnessing some deliberate attempts," the official said Tuesday. He said that Viasat was so far resisting the hackers with defensive measures but that "we've been seeing repeated attempts by this attacker to alter that pattern to test those new mitigations and defenses."</p> <p>The official - who spoke on the condition that he not be identified - briefed Reuters ahead of a report being published early Wednesday which outlines how the hackers systematically sabotaged satellite modems across Europe - and in Ukraine in particular - on the morning of Russia's invasion.</p> <p>The exact effect of the outage on Ukraine still is not clear, but the disruptive hack triggered "a really huge loss in communications" at the outset of the conflict, Ukrainian cybersecurity official Victor Zhora told reporters during a briefing on March 15.</p> <p>Few other details have been released since. On Friday, the Washington Post said that U.S. analysts believed that the hackers were working for Russia's military intelligence agency.</p> <p>The report did not identify the hackers and the Viasat official said the company would not be commenting on who might be responsible.</p> <p>The Russian Embassy in Washington has not responded to repeated attempts to seek comment about the hack.</p>

Viasat's report said that the intruders took advantage of a misconfigured virtual private networking device to gain remote access to the management network for the company's KA-SAT satellite, which is run by an Italy-based company called Skylogic and serves customers across Europe.

Skylogic did not immediately return a message late Tuesday.

The report said that it was from inside the network that the hackers sent rogue commands to tens of thousands of modems all at once, overwriting key chunks of data in the device's memory and rendering them inoperable.

The report said the disruptive hack began about 6:15 a.m. Ukraine time on Feb. 24 and would eventually cripple a majority of Viasat's modems in Ukraine. The parallel attack using malicious traffic began about an hour earlier.

The company declined to provide a global figure of stricken devices but the report said that nearly 30,000 fresh modems had already been shipped to distributors to bring customers back online.

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## Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Convicted terrorist jailed for selling meth</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.oc-breeze.com/2022/03/30/211177_convicted-terrorist-sentenced-to-over-15-years-in-federal-prison-for-selling-pounds-of-methamphetamine-while-on-supervised-release/">https://www.oc-breeze.com/2022/03/30/211177_convicted-terrorist-sentenced-to-over-15-years-in-federal-prison-for-selling-pounds-of-methamphetamine-while-on-supervised-release/</a>
GIST	<p>An Orange County man was sentenced to 188 months in federal prison for selling nearly four pounds of methamphetamine while he was on supervised release following a 2009 terrorism conviction.</p> <p>Ahmed Binyamin Alasiri, 45, a.k.a. Kevin Lamar James, of Garden Grove, was sentenced by United States District Judge Cormac J. Carney. Judge Carney also sentenced Alasiri to 24 months in federal prison for violating the terms of his supervised release, a sentence that will run concurrently to Alasiri's 188-month term.</p> <p>Alasiri pleaded guilty in October 2021 to one count of distribution of methamphetamine.</p> <p>About one year after being released from prison and while serving a term of federal supervised release, Alasiri sold methamphetamine to a buyer on three occasions.</p> <p>"[Alasiri] was industrious and obtained legitimate full-time employment, yet he did not hesitate to traffic in drugs to earn income," prosecutors argued in a sentencing memorandum. "He valued his personal short-term goals over respect for the law, the societal and individual damage caused by narcotics, and the risk of arrest for drug trafficking."</p> <p>On July 24, 2020, Alasiri sold the buyer 430 grams of pure methamphetamine in exchange for \$3,700. On August 6, 2020, Alasiri exchanged 435 grams of pure methamphetamine to the buyer for \$3,700. On August 20, 2020, Alasiri distributed 877 grams of pure methamphetamine to the buyer in exchange for \$7,400.</p> <p>The total weight of the methamphetamine was approximately 1.7 kilograms (3.8 pounds).</p> <p>Alasiri admitted in his plea agreement that he – not the buyer – first raised the topic of selling drugs, and that he had "family members who were drug traffickers and that he himself sold drugs to customers."</p> <p>Alasiri is on supervised release after completing a 16-year federal prison sentence for conspiring to levy war against the United States through terrorism. Alasiri's co-conspirators committed numerous armed</p>

robberies of gas stations to raise money for attacks Alasari planned on U.S. military operations and Israeli and Jewish facilities in Southern California. Alasiri completed his prison sentence in September 2019.

This case was investigated by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) in Orange County, with assistance from the following JTTF agencies and other partners: the Los Angeles Police Department, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, the United States Probation Office, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, the Garden Grove Police Department, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Orange County Sheriff's Department, the California Highway Patrol, the United States Department of Defense, and the Orange County Intelligence Assessment Center.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Trial begins: ISIS militant accused of torture</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-vi/2022/03/30/elsheikh-beatles-hostages-trial-opens/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-vi/2022/03/30/elsheikh-beatles-hostages-trial-opens/</a>
GIST	<p>El Shafee Elsheikh has admitted in numerous media interviews that he helped the Islamic State seek ransoms from the families of Western hostages captured during the Syrian civil war, beating the prisoners and demanding personal information.</p> <p>But on trial in Alexandria, Va., federal court and facing a potential life term, Elsheikh is arguing that those admissions were false and that surviving hostages who identify him as one of four British militants known as the "Beatles" are mistaken.</p> <p>Elsheikh was "a simple ISIS fighter," his attorney Edward MacMahon said in his opening statement Wednesday at the outset of a trial that could last through April. "Mr. Elsheikh was not a member of the 'Beatles' and not involved in the kidnapping, torture and deaths of any of these individuals." The Islamic State is also known as ISIS.</p> <p>Elsheikh is the only one of the four on trial. Executioner Mohammed Emwazi, better known as "Jihadi John," <a href="#">died in a drone strike</a> in 2015. Aine Davis is in prison in Turkey. Alexandra Kotey <a href="#">pleaded guilty</a> in Alexandria last year.</p> <p>Although they always wore masks, the British captors stood out as "utterly terrifying" compared with other guards, Assistant U.S. Attorney John Gibbs said in his opening statement. The group beat, waterboarded and tortured hostages, Gibbs said. European hostages who were released in exchange for ransoms are expected to testify about that treatment during the trial, as will a woman from the Yazidi minority group who escaped captivity.</p> <p>The witnesses shared prison cells from 2012 to 2014 with American and British hostages who did not survive. Three Americans — journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff and aid worker Peter Kassig — were beheaded by Emwazi, and their deaths were displayed in harrowing propaganda videos. A fourth, aid worker Kayla Mueller, died in unknown circumstances after being enslaved and sexually assaulted by Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Gibbs said.</p> <p>Pictures of her body were sent to her family. Elsheikh is charged with involvement in all four deaths.</p> <p>Prosecutors will not show "the most graphic images" in court, Gibbs said, but they will be available for jurors to view on their own.</p> <p>The evidence will be "beyond heartbreaking and horrific," MacMahon agreed, showing "horrible, despicable and senseless acts — the willful mistreatment of human beings by other human beings." He said there was "no doubt" that Elsheikh joined the Islamic State. But he said that what Elsheikh told journalists and what hostages describe will be "inconsistent." He suggested that Elsheikh admitted to involvement in the hostage-taking only to avoid being put on trial in Iraq.</p> <p>To prove otherwise, prosecutors plan to show the portions of media interviews alongside encrypted messages from Emwazi to his brother in London and admissions Elsheikh made to FBI agents.</p>

	<p>“He said his role started at the very beginning, when there were only two hostages,” Gibbs said. Foley was one.</p> <p>Eventually, the assistant U.S. attorney says, that number grew to 26. They were people who, he said, during “a huge humanitarian crisis” in “one of the most dangerous places in the world ... traveled there to help.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Paris attacks suspect's suicide vest faulty</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/30/paris-attacks-2015-defendant-salah-abdeslam-trial-suicide-vest-questions">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/30/paris-attacks-2015-defendant-salah-abdeslam-trial-suicide-vest-questions</a>
GIST	<p>A police explosives expert has told a court that the suicide vest worn by the main suspect on trial for the 2015 <a href="#">Paris terror attacks</a> that left 130 people dead and hundreds injured was faulty.</p> <p>The witness said the detonators on the front and back of the vest abandoned by Salah Abdeslam near a rubbish bin were “defective” and there was no switch or battery present.</p> <p>“I suppose it could have been set off with a match or a lighter. And if the TATP [explosive] was dry enough it could have gone off unexpectedly by itself,” he said.</p> <p>The testimony threw doubt on Abdeslam’s claims that he willingly backed out of taking part in the attacks at the last minute.</p> <p>The police expert admitted it was impossible to know if Abdeslam had tried to detonate the vest. “We can’t know that: it’s instant; either it works or it doesn’t work,” he said.</p> <p>When Abdeslam called friends in Belgium to ask them to come and collect him on the night of the attacks, he told them the vest had not worked. On Wednesday, he claimed this was a lie.</p> <p>“I chose not to set off my suicide vest. Not out of cowardice or fear, but I didn’t want to do it. I wore it but I didn’t set it off. That’s all. I was ashamed that I hadn’t gone through with it when I knew what the others had done. I was 25 and I was afraid of what others would think. It was the fact I was ashamed. Simply that,” he told the court.</p> <p>Asked about the expert’s conclusions, he said he had removed the push-button detonator and the battery before leaving it “in a place where there was little chance it would be found and touched by anyone”.</p> <p>He insisted he had not tried to set off the explosive, but refused to say more.</p> <p>Victims’ families packed the specially built high-security court at Paris’s Palais de Justice on Wednesday to hear Abdeslam explain what had happened on the night of 13 November 2015 as he had earlier promised. Instead, he said he was invoking his right to silence.</p> <p>Prosecutor Nicolas Le Bris accused Abdeslam of “playing the star”.</p> <p>“Salah Abdeslam promised to give us explanations and he is not doing so,” Le Bris said.</p> <p>Le Bris reminded Abdeslam that in a will left on his computer and in a letter to his mother, he had written that he was a “combatant for Allah”. He said the suspect had admitted wanting to travel to Syria to fight but had been told to remain in Europe to “work” there.</p> <p>“This word ‘work’ we know is not innocent when we consider what you do. It means to commit attacks,” Le Bris said. “Long before the attacks, you were fully aware of what would happen later. What you have said is lies. You did what you did willingly and in the full knowledge of what was to happen.”</p>



He said a witness who had met the Paris commando unit on the eve of the attacks told investigators he had found them calm.

“How could you and friends be so calm when you knew the next day you would go and destroy all those lives, innocent lives when you were going to carry out that massacre?” Le Bris asked.

There was no answer or reaction from the accused.

Earlier, Abdeslam, 32, dressed in a black polo shirt and black trousers, had been questioned by the lead judge, Jean-Louis Périès, but replied: “I insist. I don’t want to say anything today. It’s my right ... I don’t have to justify myself.”

Périès detailed a series of unanswered questions, asking Abdeslam if he would respond after each one: had the accused seen Abdelhamid Abaaoud, considered the mastermind of the attacks, when he travelled secretly to Paris? Why had he been in tears when he met his girlfriend, Yasmina, shortly before the attacks? What had been discussed and decided when the jihadi commandos met for 10 hours in Charleroi in Belgium on 12 November?

“We can draw the serious conclusion that this is when the targets were decided, the roles handed out,” Périès said. “Who was to go where, the Stade de France, the Bataclan, the terraces ... what were you supposed to do, where were you supposed to go? We understand your brother Brahim had decided you would take part and that is why you were given an explosive vest and a Kalashnikov?” Périès asked.

Abdeslam refused to answer.

Périès continued: “There are two theories: one that you backed out as you have previously suggested and the other that your material [suicide vest] was defective,” the judge said. “Why did you cross Paris from north to south with your suicide vest? Did you plan to explode it in the Métro or elsewhere like your brother did?” Abdeslam did not answer.

The judge said Abdeslam had been in the 18th arrondissement of Paris and that later Islamic State (IS) had said there had been an attack in the 18th arrondissement when there was not. “What exactly were you supposed to do on 13 November?” he asked, to no answer.

“So many questions without a response,” the judge added.

Last month, Abdeslam, took the stand to be cross-examined for the first time, telling the court that he had never killed or wounded anyone and was not a danger to the public. He indicated he would explain what happened “at a later date”.

He admitted supporting IS but insisted he had willingly dumped his explosive vest later found by a street cleaner among a pile of rubbish near a bin in Montrouge, south of Paris close to Abdeslam’s location on the night of 13 November. After the attacks, Abdeslam’s mobile phone was geolocated in Paris’s northern 18th arrondissement and later in Châtillon, a suburb near Montrouge.

Abdeslam is suspected of being the only surviving member of a group of jihadists who carried out the coordinated series of bombings and shootings across the French capital.

Le Bris said he was convinced Abdeslam was determined to carry out an attack and that if he had really backed out he would have remained in the north of Paris and returned to Belgium instead of crossing the city with his suicide belt.

IS claimed responsibility for the attacks, which began at about 9pm with the detonation of a suicide bomb at the Stade de France stadium and continued with a number of drive-by shootings and bombings at busy cafes and restaurants in the capital, and a massacre at the Bataclan concert hall.



	<p>The marathon legal process is the biggest ever criminal trial in France. Fourteen suspects are in the dock and another six people are being tried in their absence, five of them presumed dead in Iraq or Syria; the last is in prison in Turkey.</p> <p>Lawyers for the victims and families made repeated attempts on Wednesday to persuade Abdeslam to break his silence. One told him: "All those people are dead, all those people were injured because you took part in those attacks – and still today you spit in their faces by refusing to explain why they died or were injured."</p> <p>Abdeslam remained impassive, breaking his silence briefly to say: "To express myself or keep silent makes no difference ... I know I will be judged severely not because I deserve it but because it will satisfy those here."</p> <p>The trial continues.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Oregon: 6<sup>th</sup> highest domestic extremism</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/report-oregon-saw-the-6th-highest-number-of-domestic-extremism-incidents-over-the-last-decade">https://komonews.com/news/local/report-oregon-saw-the-6th-highest-number-of-domestic-extremism-incidents-over-the-last-decade</a>
GIST	<p>SALEM, Ore. — Over the past decade, Oregon saw the sixth-highest number of violent domestic extremism incidents in the nation, according to a new report from the secretary of state's office.</p> <p>Secretary of State Shemia Fagan and the Oregon Audits Division released an advisory report on Wednesday that identifies efforts that Oregon state agencies can undertake to thwart it.</p> <p><b><i>"Oregon must be an inclusive place where everyone is and feels safe." said Secretary of State Shemia Fagan. "The rise in domestic terrorism is an immediate threat to Oregonians and we cannot simply wait for the next incident to occur. We can and must take immediate steps to prevent individuals at risk from being radicalized and becoming violent."</i></b></p> <p>There were 11 domestic violent extremism incidents in 2020 in Oregon, according to the report. A majority of the 2020 incidents were associated with the near nightly protests and riots in Portland, including the night a Donald Trump supporter was shot and killed by a counter-protester. The report also mentions the December Oregon State Capitol building breach by "Reopen Oregon" demonstrators.</p> <p>"Oregon's risks are not theoretical, they're actual risks that we're facing," Kip Memmott, the audits director for the secretary of state's office, said.</p> <p>The report says Oregon is one of only 16 states that does not have any legislation defining or criminalizing domestic terrorism or domestic violent extremism at the state level.</p> <p>"I'm surprised it's not higher on the list, actually," Randy Blazak, a sociologist and expert in extremism, said. "We have a long history of extremist groups in the state. There is an ideology in Oregon that we are kind of separate from the rest of the country, so we are a hotbed for white supremacist groups and militia groups."</p> <p>Blazak pointed out the 2016 incident in Harney County when a group of far-right extremists took over the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. That incident is listed as a significant event in the report, as is a 1984 incident with the Rajneesh group who intentionally gave hundreds of people salmonella in an attempt to cut back on voter turnout.</p> <p>The report also found the Oregon Homeland Security council can do more to focus on domestic violent extremism by establishing a specific statewide strategy for countering violent extremism risks.</p>

	Identifying individuals at risk of becoming violent is critical to threat management, according to the secretary of state's office. However, current law enforcement and state employee training is limited, the report says.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<a href="#">Click on source link to view full report</a>

HEADLINE	<b>03/31 Germany repatriates 37 from Syria camp</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/germany-repatriates-women-children-syrian-camp-83779268">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/germany-repatriates-women-children-syrian-camp-83779268</a>
GIST	<p>BERLIN -- Germany says it has brought home 10 women and 27 children from a camp in northeastern Syria where suspected members of the Islamic State group have been held.</p> <p>Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said the group was repatriated from the Roj camp on Wednesday in what she called an “extremely difficult” operation. She said some of the mothers were taken into custody immediately after arriving in Germany.</p> <p>“The 27 children are, at the end of the day, victims of IS, and they have a right to a better future far from its deadly ideology, and also to live in security, as we would wish for our own children,” Baerbock said in a statement. “The mothers must be held accountable for their actions.”</p> <p>Germany previously repatriated 23 children and their eight mothers from Roj in October. At the same time, neighboring Denmark brought home 14 children and three women.</p> <p>Baerbock thanked Kurdish authorities in Syria and “our U.S. partners, who once again provided us with logistical support.”</p> <p>With Wednesday's operation, “the majority of the German children whose mothers are willing to return to Germany have been brought to safety,” she said. “There are now only a few special cases for which we are continuing to work on individual solutions.”</p> <p>Federal prosecutors said Thursday that four women had been arrested on arrival at Frankfurt Airport — three German citizens, identified in line with local privacy rules only as Nadine K., Gulseren T. and Emilie R., and a German-Moroccan dual citizen identified as Fatiha B.</p> <p>All are accused of membership in a foreign terrorist organization and Nadine K. of other crimes — including keeping a Yazidi woman as a slave who allegedly was regularly sexually assaulted by the suspect's husband, with her knowledge. Prosecutors said they traveled separately to Syria or Iraq in 2014 and joined IS.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Israel: gunman kills 5 in rampage</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/29/israel-attack-bnei-brak/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/29/israel-attack-bnei-brak/</a>
GIST	<p>TEL AVIV — A Palestinian gunman wielding an M16 assault rifle shot and killed five people in a suburb of Tel Aviv before he was gunned down by police Tuesday night, officials said, the latest in a string of deadly attacks inside Israel in recent days.</p> <p>The rampage in Bnei Brak, a predominantly ultra-Orthodox city, marked one of the worst terrorist attacks in Israel in years and came as Israeli authorities warned of a potential surge in violence ahead of the holy Muslim month of Ramadan, which this year will also coincide with the Jewish holiday of Passover and the Christian holiday of Easter.</p> <p>“Israel is facing a wave of murderous Arab terror,” Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said in a statement Tuesday.</p> <p>On Sunday, two Palestinian citizens of Israel shot and killed two policemen in the northern city of Hadera, an attack that came amid a summit between Israeli and Arab diplomats in the Negev desert. The Islamic</p>

State group, which has staged only a handful of attacks in Israel, claimed responsibility for the shooting. Last week, another Palestinian Israeli previously convicted for his Islamic State ties stabbed and killed four Israelis in the southern city of Beer Sheva.

In Bnei Brak on Tuesday, the assault began just before 8 p.m. local time, authorities said. The gunman walked through the city, gunning down two Ukrainian citizens sitting at the entrance of a convenience store, then fatally shooting two Israeli men before being shot by an Israeli police officer, an Arab man from the northern town of Nof Hagalil, according to an Israeli police statement. The gunman fired back, injuring the officer who later succumbed to his wounds at the hospital.

Menachem Englander, a local medic with Israel's national ambulance service, said in a statement that after hearing gunshots Tuesday night, he "immediately went out to the street and saw a terrorist pointing a weapon at me."

"By a miracle, his weapon jammed and he couldn't shoot," Englander said. "I immediately went back into my house, locked my door and reported to the emergency dispatch center."

The suspected gunman was a 27-year-old Palestinian man from the town of Yabad in the West Bank and had been staying in Israel illegally, Israeli media reported.

In the aftermath of the attack, Bnei Brak and neighboring municipalities said they would close schools and construction sites where Palestinian workers without permits are often informally employed.

Israeli Police Chief Kobi Shabtai raised the nationwide alert level to the highest possible for the first time since Israel fought a war against Hamas in Gaza in May. That conflict was sparked in part by bloody clashes between Palestinians and Israeli police in Jerusalem during Ramadan.

Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, released a statement praising the Tuesday attack as a "heroic action against the occupation in Tel Aviv."

The Palestinian Authority, which is based in the West Bank, said the "killing of Palestinian and Israeli civilians will only lead to a further deterioration in the situation, as we try to achieve stability on the eve of Ramadan and the Jewish and Christian holidays."

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HEADLINE	03/29 Denmark: pandemic 'anti-govt.' extremism
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/covid-business-health-europe-covid-19-pandemic-17b154cb5ff9dc21f3443917accf7f95">https://apnews.com/article/covid-business-health-europe-covid-19-pandemic-17b154cb5ff9dc21f3443917accf7f95</a>
GIST	<p>COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Denmark's domestic security on Tuesday designated pandemic-linked "antigovernmental extremism" as a menace for the first time ever.</p> <p>The agency, known by its Danish acronym PET, said in its annual assessment that although this type of extremism is not "a significant driving force for the terrorist threat" in the country, it does make the situation "more complex."</p> <p>PET said the menace which expresses the need to use violence against elected representatives, had appeared in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Michael Hamann, head of PET's Center for Terror Analysis that analyzes the threat of terrorism against Denmark and Danish interests abroad, said the vast majority of instances where authorities were heavily criticized for their handling of the pandemic unfolded peacefully.</p> <p>Hamann cited examples where such criticism has been expressed by "threats and intimidation" in Denmark, while there have been examples abroad "of planning or carrying out actual violent acts."</p>

	<p>But he said in a statement that the threat from antigovernment extremism is “limited in level.”</p> <p>The general terrorism threat Denmark is “serious”, defined as having the “capacity, intention and planning,” PET said. Militant Islamism still constitutes the most significant terrorist threat against the Scandinavian country and Danish interests abroad.</p> <p>However, the risk that the Danish population would be affected by terrorism remains “very low.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 UK: ‘fascist’ cell members convicted</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-60918045">https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-60918045</a>
GIST	<p>Four members of a "fascist" cell who made pistol parts on a 3D printer and celebrated right-wing attacks have been convicted of a range of offences.</p> <p>Daniel Wright, 29, Liam Hall, 31, and Stacey Salmon, 29, all from Keighley, West Yorkshire, and Samuel Whibley, 29, from Menai Bridge, Anglesey, had denied the charges.</p> <p>During the trial prosecutors said the four <a href="#">"celebrated racist violence and killing"</a> through online messages. They will be sentenced at a later date.</p> <p>A two-month trial, which was moved to Doncaster Crown Court due to problems at Sheffield Crown Court, heard the defendants used online messaging app Telegram to exchange terror manuals, share racist ideology and post videos of atrocities.</p> <p>Prosecutor Annabel Darlow QC said the group described killers such as Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh and Anders Breivik, who murdered 77 people in Norway, as "saints".</p> <p>She told jurors the group also had an "active interest in the manufacture of explosives and weaponry".</p> <p>Daniel Wright, of Whinfield Avenue, Keighley, was found guilty of disseminating a terrorist publication, possessing articles for terrorist purposes, and the collection of information contrary to the Terrorism Act.</p> <p>He was also found guilty of possessing and manufacturing a firearm.</p> <p>Liam Hall, of Hill Top Walk, Keighley, was cleared of possessing articles for terrorist purposes, but found guilty of possessing and manufacturing a firearm.</p> <p>Hall's partner Stacey Salmon, of the same address, was also cleared of possessing articles for terrorist purposes, but convicted of possessing a firearm.</p> <p>Samuel Whibley, of Derwen Deg, Menai Bridge, Anglesey, was found guilty of the encouragement of terrorism and disseminating a terrorist publication.</p> <p>Det Ch Supt Martin Snowden, head of counter terrorism policing north east, said unknown to the four defendants an undercover officer had infiltrated their online chat.</p> <p>"None of their security measures were enough to maintain their anonymity, or ultimately prevent their arrest and prosecution," he said.</p> <p>He said the group had a "deeply entrenched extreme right-win mindset".</p> <p>"The vitriolic hatred expressed by these defendants went far beyond an intolerance of others," he said.</p> <p>"While the group had no clear target at the time of their arrest, they pushed relentlessly for violent action in pursuit of their objectives.</p>

	<p>The judge, Mr Justice Spencer said he hoped to sentence the four before the end of May, however reports needed to be prepared about Wright and Whibley to help him assess the danger they presented.</p> <p>"There needs to be a lot of thought given over to the sentences in this case," he said.</p>
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## Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	03/30 Too many public records requests?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/03/30/elouise-mcdaniel-irvington-lawsuit/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/03/30/elouise-mcdaniel-irvington-lawsuit/</a>
GIST	<p>A New Jersey township is suing an 82-year-old retiree with a penchant for requesting information about the mayor for harassment and defamation, alleging she has filed too many public records requests.</p> <p>Irvington, a western suburb of Newark, <a href="#">sued</a> retired schoolteacher Elouise McDaniel last fall, saying she filed more than 75 requests for information in three years — a rate the plaintiffs considered “voluminous” and “overly burdensome.”</p> <p>The specific information McDaniel requested over the past few years and how much it cost township officials was not immediately clear and was not specified in the 12-page lawsuit filed in September 2021 in a New Jersey trial court.</p> <p>The township seeks to bar McDaniel from filing “meritless complaints with governmental agencies” and seeks unspecified punitive damages.</p> <p>Neither McDaniel nor an attorney representing the township immediately responded to requests for comment Wednesday, but information transparency advocates said that the government suing members of the public over information requests is a red flag — and that such lawsuits are on the rise.</p> <p>State-level legislation that targets what’s known as “vexatious requesters” — a catchall term for a person the government designates as being a nuisance because of the volume and nature of public records requests they file — has been “picking up steam” in the past five years, said Dave Cuillier, president of the National Freedom of Information Coalition and professor at the University of Arizona School of Journalism.</p> <p>“This momentum is really dangerous,” Cuillier said of the growing number of states that have tried to make it easier to sideline people from requesting government information. “And it’s a slippery slope: One person’s vexatious requester is another person’s investigative reporter exposing corruption.”</p> <p>Federal public records laws were put in place to push back against government secrecy after the Cold War turned governmental affairs into a black box, while state-level laws got a boost after <a href="#">Watergate</a>, Cuillier said.</p> <p>“A lot of folks in power don’t want transparency — it makes it harder, so they find ways to undermine the system, to game the system, and make it harder for people to see what their government is doing,” he said.</p> <p>In the past five to 10 years, states including Connecticut, Illinois, Pennsylvania and Utah are among those that have proposed or passed laws that give government agencies a mechanism to deny “vexatious requesters” access to public information.</p> <p>McDaniel told WNBC News Channel 4, <a href="#">which brought her story to light last week</a>, that she filed information requests about Irvington Mayor Tony Vauss (D) and his administration under New Jersey’s Open Public Records Act.</p>

"I'm a homeowner. I pay taxes, so I think I'm entitled to know how my hard-earned tax dollars are being spent," McDaniel told WNBC. She described herself to the station as a critic of the mayor who ran against him in an election.

The township, in its lawsuit, says McDaniel not only filed numerous requests but disrupted City Council meetings and interacted with municipal employees in a "confrontational and harassing manner."

In 2017, the lawsuit alleges, McDaniel pointed at a township council member during a meeting and walked toward the official, saying, "I'm going to get you and you're going to pay."

Cuillier said the concern with Irvington's lawsuit is that it mixes what should be separate issues and puts McDaniel's public records request efforts under the same umbrella as harassment and defamation.

"They're mad at this person for far more than public records requests," he said. "Requesting information from our government is a good behavior that should be encouraged; defaming public officials, harassing them, that's not good behavior, and we have to separate these two concepts."

Adam Marshall, an attorney for the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, said there's a concern that government entities may wield the term "vexatious requester" against someone they don't like.

"The idea that sending two records requests a month might be considered vexatious seems pretty crazy to me," he said of the alleged frequency of McDaniel's requests to the township.

McDaniel told WNBC that she doesn't have the money to defend herself in the lawsuit and is afraid.

"I'm really tired," McDaniel told the station. "I want to live out my last days in peace. I don't need this."

Marshall notes that sometimes [government agencies can sue](#) in what are known as reverse public information lawsuits to effectively get a court to take action against a requester, often by determining that a request is too broad or that the agency doesn't have to comply with the request because the information is exempt.

Marshall said such suits are "incredibly dangerous" from the perspective of an informed populace and can have a chilling effect on the public.

"If you know the government might sue you because you're seeking information about what the government is doing, you might think twice about submitting a records request," he said.

WNBC noted that during the reporting process that led to its Friday broadcast about McDaniel, Irvington sent the station a pair of cease-and-desist letters. The alleged cause it cited: harassment.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/31 Ghost flights from UK: about 500 a month</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/mar/31/ghost-flights-from-uk-running-at-500-a-month-data-reveals">https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/mar/31/ghost-flights-from-uk-running-at-500-a-month-data-reveals</a>
GIST	<p>Almost 500 "ghost flights" a month departed from the UK between October and December 2021, data has revealed.</p> <p>The information, obtained through a freedom of information request by the Guardian, shows Heathrow, Aberdeen, Manchester, Stansted and Norwich were the top five airports for such flights during the period.</p> <p>Ghost flights are defined as those with no passengers, or less than 10% of passenger capacity. The data from the Civil Aviation Authority includes only international flights leaving the UK and not arrivals, or any domestic flights.</p>



Flying is one of the most carbon-polluting activities people can undertake, and ghost flights have angered those campaigning for action on the climate crisis. Almost [15,000 ghost flights left the UK](#) between the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 and September 2021, the Guardian revealed in February. The German airline Lufthansa said in January [it would have to fly 18,000 “unnecessary” flights](#) by March.

Such flights have been blamed on the system at busy airports whereby airlines must normally run 80% of their flights, empty or not, to retain their landing slots. The rule was suspended during the pandemic and reintroduced at 50% in October 2021, but that did not appear to have significantly changed the number of monthly ghost flights.

Tim Johnson, of the Aviation Environment Federation, said: “UK airline average occupancy grew significantly in the last six months of 2021, although November’s peak at around 70% is still significantly below the 86% achieved before the pandemic. But this hasn’t altered the number of ultra-low occupancy flights in our skies each month.

“If changing market fortunes can’t solve this problem then the government must act to do so,” he said. “Its recent claim earlier that aviation can be net zero by 2050 while accommodating a 70% increase in passenger numbers (from 2018 levels) stretches belief when there are such obvious examples of inefficiency in the current system. Fixing these should be a priority.”

The government regulates aviation but no data is made public on the number of ghost flights. Only the airlines know the true number, but have not provided this data when asked by the Guardian.

“The public deserves transparency,” said Sarah Olney the Lib Dem MP and transport spokesperson. “They are not getting it from an industry keeping this nefarious practice hush-hush, and ministers have to share the blame for this serious vacuum of accountability. A government review into ghost flights is long overdue.”

Alex Sobel, a Labour MP and chair of the net zero all-party parliamentary group, said: “Although international travel has recovered somewhat, and there’s no need to fly empty planes to hubs or for maintenance, airlines don’t seem to have given up their climate-degrading practice of ghost flights.”

A parliamentary petition calling for an end to such flights has been signed by 14,000 people.

The Department for Transport said: “We acted swiftly [during the pandemic] to prevent empty aircraft needing to fly to retain their slots, however some flights may operate with low passenger numbers for a whole range of reasons, including carrying key workers or vital cargo.”

Airlines UK, the trade body for UK-registered airlines, said: “The [CAA] figures reflect two things – refreshed travel restrictions to combat the Omicron variant, leading to flights from destinations like Morocco and the far east bringing UK travellers home. Passenger aircraft have also been widely used as freighters during the pandemic, and even though these flights are carrying essential freight and supplies, including PPE, they would be inaccurately classed as ‘ghost flights’ in this analysis.”

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HEADLINE	03/31 Oligarchs jets kept flying despite sanctions
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/31/jets-linked-to-russian-oligarchs-appear-to-have-kept-flying-despite-sanctions">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/31/jets-linked-to-russian-oligarchs-appear-to-have-kept-flying-despite-sanctions</a>
GIST	<p>Private jets linked to Russian oligarchs and officials appeared to continue flying into and out of EU and UK airports despite flight bans and sanctions imposed after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, a Guardian data investigation found.</p> <p>The investigation, in collaboration with the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), identified and tracked jets linked to sanctioned businesspeople and officials including Roman Abramovich, Alisher Usmanov and Igor Shuvalov, a former Russian deputy prime minister.</p>



While some plane movements appeared to comply with airspace bans and sanctions, including asset freezes, others appeared to escape restrictions.

Guardian analysis also showed jets linked to Russians under sanctions flew to the United Arab Emirates in greater numbers during the week after the start of the invasion than any other week of 2022.

The UAE is popular with Russians as a finance and leisure centre.

Jets linked to Shuvalov were tracked flying into and out of EU airports after sanctions were imposed by the bloc on 23 February, the day before Russia began its invasion of Ukraine.

His Bombardier Global Express jet, registration LX-ABC, made several flights between Geneva, Munich, Paris, Milan and Helsinki after that date, according to data provided by the flight tracking service Flightradar24. The records do not include details of who was on board the plane, which typically sells for \$10m (£7.6m).

EU sanctions rules allow those targeted by the restrictions to make payments to meet “basic needs” such as legal fees but do not mention expenses associated with the movements of private planes, such as buying jet fuel.

The Uzbekistan-born billionaire Usmanov, a major sponsor of Everton football club and a former 30% shareholder in Arsenal, is linked to two other multimillion-pound jets.

Both planes flew out of EU airports after “Russian-owned, Russian-registered or Russian-controlled aircraft” were banned from EU airspace by the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, according to data from ADS-B Exchange, a website that collects live aircraft transponder data.

Usmanov’s Airbus A340, the commercial version of which can seat 370 passengers, left Munich on the evening of 28 February and was last recorded descending over Tashkent that night.

The jet, which is decorated with distinctive maroon livery, cost between \$350m and \$500m and is one of the largest private jets in Russia, according to the US Treasury, which said its tail number, M-IABU, stands for “I’m Alisher Burhanovich Usmanov”.

The flight took place the day after the EU flight ban was imposed and the same day Usmanov was added to the bloc’s sanctions list.

The second jet left Florence in Italy the same day and was also heading towards Uzbekistan when the transponder signal was lost over Turkmenistan.

A spokesperson for Usmanov said sanctions against him were based on “incorrect” assumptions about his relationship with the Kremlin, adding that his assets, including private jets, had been transferred to irrevocable trusts long before sanctions were imposed against the billionaire.

“[We] deny there was any wrongdoing or attempt to avoid any assets being sanctioned,” the spokesperson said. “Given the fact that the MI-ABU jet you invoked is not owned or controlled by Mr Usmanov, and could only be used by him on lease terms, there is no legal grounds for any ban on it in relation to the individual sanctions imposed against him.

“Regarding compliance with the rules of aircraft departures, our detailed legal analysis found no violations. To the best of our knowledge, the departure was made in accordance with the permission of the authorised authority of the country from which the aircraft departed.”

The spokesperson did not respond to an inquiry about whether Usmanov was onboard either of the flights.

While some of the jets remain out of the reach of authorities despite being linked to oligarchs under sanctions, other aircraft have already been seized or barred from flying.

Jets linked to Abramovich have also been active in the weeks since the Ukraine invasion, which has resulted in the Chelsea FC owner being sanctioned by the UK and the EU.

One, a Bombardier Global 6000, registration LX-LUX, is now grounded in Latvia, denied permission to leave by the authorities pending confirmation of its ownership by authorities in Luxembourg, where the plane is registered.

If it is found to belong to Abramovich, who has been linked to at least three other private jets, it will be considered a frozen asset, Aivis Vincevs, of Latvia's Civil Aviation Agency, told the news website Re:Baltica.

A close associate of Abramovich, Eugene Shvidler, has also had two jets seized by UK authorities, at London Biggin Hill and Farnborough airports.

One jet had flown from Biggin Hill to Farnborough on 27 February, according to the Flightradar24 data. The jet also made a transatlantic flight to a small airport outside New York later on 27 February, returning to Farnborough on 4 March.

A UK flight ban on Russian aircraft came into effect two days earlier.

A spokesperson for Shvidler said there had "never been any breaches" and that he was not a Russian citizen and did not have any ties to the Kremlin.

Aircraft that visited the UAE include some of those linked in previous reports to Abramovich and the Ukrainian opposition politician Viktor Medvedchuk, as well as Russian businesspeople Andrey Guryev, Andrey Melnichenko and Oleg Deripaska.

The UAE has been described as the "Switzerland of the Persian Gulf" by organisations including Tax Justice Network, owing to its high degree of banking secrecy, suggesting oligarchs barred from other financial centres may have travelled there to organise their financial affairs.

A jet reportedly linked to Melnichenko, a billionaire whose superyacht was seized by Italian authorities earlier this month, flew to Dubai on 9 March, according to Flightradar data. The Boeing 737 is currently under investigation in Luxembourg, where it is registered.

A spokesperson for Melnichenko said he was an international self-made entrepreneur who had "no relation to the tragic events in Ukraine".

"He has no political affiliations. There is no justification whatsoever for placing him on any sanctions lists."

A spokesperson for Deripaska said sanctions against him were "deeply misguided".

"The decision to sanction Mr Deripaska has nothing to do with justice or law, neither does the freezing of assets belonging to him or his family. Therefore, as he already stated on his Twitter account, it will be for the courts and the police to discover the true origins and beneficiaries of this decision."

Spokespeople for Abramovich, Shuvalov, Medvedchuk and Guryev did not return requests for comment.

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HEADLINE	03/30 Dark moment history: internment camps
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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/japanese-americans-from-bainbridge-island-remember-being-forced-into-internment-camps-80-years-ago">https://www.q13fox.com/news/japanese-americans-from-bainbridge-island-remember-being-forced-into-internment-camps-80-years-ago</a>
GIST	<p><b>BAINBRIDGE ISLAND, Wash.</b> - 80 years ago today, the Pacific Northwest marked a dark moment in history.</p> <p>On March 30, 1942, 272 Japanese Americans living in <a href="#">Bainbridge Island</a> were forced out of their homes and sent to internment camps. They were the first people in the United States subjected to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's executive order after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.</p> <p>Soon after, about 120,000 people of Japanese descent were forced out of their homes and land.</p> <p>Of the 272 people forced to leave Bainbridge Island, about 150 returned after World War II. Currently, there are about six survivors living on the island or nearby. They were joined by community members Wednesday at the <a href="#">Japanese American Exclusion Memorial</a>, commemorating the 80th anniversary of that fateful day.</p> <p>96-year-old Satoru Sakuma had his son Bryan and granddaughter Natalie by his side. He was just 16 years old when the exclusion occurred. After his release from the internment camp, Sakuma served with the 442nd Infantry Regiment, the most decorated regiment in U.S. history. He was also a Purple Heart recipient.</p> <p>"After the war and being in that battalion, they came, and they didn't really have anything left here. So, they went to Skagit Valley and continued their berry farm there," said Sakuma's granddaughter, Natalie.</p> <p>When asked how it felt to be back at Bainbridge Island, Sakuma said it "feels great," and he appreciated everyone attending the ceremony to recognize the moment in history. In the 80 years since the removal of Japanese-descent residents, the healing continues throughout the community.</p> <p>"He never wanted the narrative to be of anger or hatred. It was just, he wanted it to be something that was never forgotten, and a narrative of hope and healing and love and community," said Natalie.</p> <p>Some survivors said they remember several of their Bainbridge Island neighbors standing against the exclusion.</p> <p>"They didn't believe we could be terrorists or spies, or that we were more connected to Japan than America," said Lilly Kodama, who was sent to an internment camp at age 7.</p> <p>Kodama said prejudices she experienced then don't compare to the anti-Asian hate seen around the world now.</p> <p>"Lately, people are actually attacked and hurt and well, that's a whole different thing," said Kodama.</p> <p>"Today we live in an atmosphere of manufactured fear and hysteria, creating a toxic cloud of anti-Asian bigotry, prejudice, assault and death, feeding the racial strife that daily threatens marginalized communities of color and sexual orientation. This threatens the liberty and justice for us all," said Bainbridge Island city council member, Clarence Moriwaki.</p> <p>Governor Jay Inslee also gave remarks at the ceremony with a message of everyone working together to stand against the power of fear. Sakuma's family said that's exactly why he chose to live here his life all these years.</p> <p>"His generation has continued living life. That is what you do—you just keep giving back and loving. And you just have to be that example," said Natalie. "His life is this beautiful story of courage and love. It's my inspiration."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/30 Pickleball Washington State's official sport
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/pickleball-players-proud-after-game-is-designated-as-washington-states-official-sport">https://www.q13fox.com/news/pickleball-players-proud-after-game-is-designated-as-washington-states-official-sport</a>
GIST	<p><b>MILL CREEK, Wash.</b> - A day after Governor Jay Inslee <a href="#">signed a bill naming pickleball as Washington State's official sport</a>, we met with the players who have been advocating for this moment since last summer.</p> <p>"I get such joy from playing," said Kate Van Gent, USA Pickleball Ambassador. "I made so many new friends from playing, and I want to share that with other people."</p> <p>Van Gent said she picked up a paddle for the first time the summer of 2020 when she joined a women's league in her neighborhood.</p> <p>"I had no familiarity with pickleball at the time. In fact, I was a little intimidated to join," said Van Gent who said the group of women is all beginners and learned how to play together.</p> <p>The game itself was invented on <a href="#">Bainbridge Island</a> in 1965. Many describe it as a mixture of tennis, badminton and ping pong.</p> <p>"The sport tends to be infectious, and you want to share the empowerment, the joy, the friendship and new community bonds. It's amazing what it does for people," said Van Gent. "I lost 12 pounds in two months, my heart rate went down to normal, my blood pressure went back to normal. The health benefits for me were just phenomenal. I was sold."</p> <p>Pickleball is now the official state sport of Washington.</p> <p>Van Gent said by coincidence, she ran into State Senator John Lovick (D) WA-District 44. "He said, did you say pickle ball, and I said yeah," said Van Gent.</p> <p>"Nine months ago, a good friend of mine, Chuck Wright, we were out walking one day, and he asked me if we had a state sport and I said, 'not to my knowledge.' He said we should make pickleball a state sport," said State Sen. Lovick who sponsored the bill. "I don't know of a bill that I've sponsored yet that has generated so much fun, so much attention, it's just so much goodwill in our community. We have a lot of great teams here. The Zags, the Seahawks but pickleball is the official state sport."</p> <p>Wright said his love of pickleball started decades ago, and he even installed a court at his home in <a href="#">Mill Creek</a> when he moved there in the early 1990s.</p> <p>"My kids then were in high school. They would contact their friends, and they'd have tournaments. Four, five hour tournaments and I said, 'oh wow, that's really good.' It gets me involved with my kids and at that time I was playing too," said Wright. "To my pleasant surprise, I found out that we didn't have [a state sport]. I said, 'John, why don't we have pickle ball because pickleball is born in Washington. Pickleball is Washington and Washington is Pickleball.'"</p> <p>Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in the U.S. and last year there were nearly five million players across the country, according to USA Pickleball Association. The association attributes the sports rapid growth to its popularity within community centers, PE classes, YMCA facilities and retirement communities.</p> <p>State Sen. Lovick and local players are now working to grow youth programming, build designated pickleball courts and even grow pickleball tourism in the state.</p> <p>The CEO of USA Pickleball Stu Upson was on Bainbridge Island for the signing of the bill. Upson shared there are plans to bring pickleball to the Olympics with hopes of having it as an exhibition sport in the 2028 games.</p>
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## Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	03/29 Civilian Army leader led child porn ring
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-business-arizona-army-sierra-vista-2dd2790f0b68117f561a46a474421358">https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-business-arizona-army-sierra-vista-2dd2790f0b68117f561a46a474421358</a>
GIST	<p>SIERRA VISTA, Ariz. (AP) — David Frodsham was a top civilian commander at a U.S. air base in Afghanistan when he “jokingly” asked an IT technician for access to YouPorn, the video-sharing pornographic website.</p> <p>During his time in the war zone, Frodsham told one woman that he hired her because he “wanted to be surrounded by pretty women,” and routinely called others “honey,” “babe,” and “cougar” before he was ordered home after the military verified multiple allegations of sexual harassment.</p> <p>“I would not recommend placing him back into a position of authority but rather pursuing disciplinary actions at his home station,” wrote one commanding officer when recommending that the Army order Frodsham to leave his post at Bagram Airfield and return to Fort Huachuca, a major Army installation in Arizona, according to a U.S. Army investigative file obtained by The Associated Press.</p> <p>But when Frodsham returned to his home station in fall 2015, he rejoined the Network Enterprise Technology Command, the Army’s information technology service provider, where he had served as director of personnel for a global command of 15,000 soldiers and civilians, according to his Army resume.</p> <p>By spring of the following year, he was arrested in Arizona for leading a child sex abuse ring that included an Army sergeant who was posting child pornography to the internet. Among the victims was one of Frodsham’s adopted sons</p> <p>Frodsham pleaded guilty to sex abuse charges in 2016 and is serving a 17-year sentence. But records reviewed by the AP show that the U.S. Army and the state of Arizona missed or ignored multiple red flags over more than a decade, which allowed Frodsham to allegedly abuse his adopted son and other children for years, all the while putting national security at risk.</p> <p>The state permitted Frodsham and his wife, Barbara, to foster, adopt and retain custody of their many children despite nearly 20 complaints, and attempted complaints, of abuse, neglect, maltreatment and licensing violations. Meanwhile, the Army gave Frodsham security clearances and sensitive jobs at a time when his illicit sexual practices made him vulnerable to blackmail.</p> <p>“He would have been an obvious target of foreign intelligence services because of his role and his location,” said Frank Figliuzzi, the former assistant director of counterintelligence for the FBI. “Fort Huachuca is one of the more sensitive installations in the continental United States. People with security issues should not be there.” In addition to NETCOM, where Frodsham worked, Fort Huachuca is home to the Army’s Intelligence and Security Command, according to its website.</p> <p>Public relations officials at Fort Huachuca confirmed that Frodsham was a program manager for NETCOM before he was arrested on child sex abuse charges. They declined to say whether Frodsham was disciplined after returning from Afghanistan, or whether the Army ever considered him a security risk.</p> <p>Frodsham, former Sgt. Randall Bischak and a third man not associated with the Army are all serving prison terms for the roles they played in the child sex abuse ring. But the investigation is continuing because Sierra Vista police believe additional men took part.</p>

Now, the criminal investigation is spilling over into civil court, where two of Frodsham's adopted sons have filed separate lawsuits against the state for licensing David and Barbara Frodsham as foster parents in a home where they say they were physically and sexually abused throughout their lives.

A third adopted son filed suit Tuesday in Arizona state court in Cochise County, said attorney Lynne Cadigan, who represents all three. In the latest complaint, 19-year-old Trever Frodsham says case workers missed or overlooked numerous signs that David and Barbara Frodsham were unfit parents. These included a 2002 sex abuse complaint filed with local police by one of the Frodshams' biological daughters against an older biological brother, and the fact that David and Barbara Frodsham were themselves victims of child sex abuse.

Trever's allegations echo those featured in an earlier lawsuit filed by his older biological brother, Ryan Frodsham, and one filed by Neal Taylor, both of whom were also adopted into the Frodsham household.

In an interview with the AP, Ryan Frodsham said his adoptive father began sexually abusing him when he was 9 or 10 years old and the abuse continued into his teens, when David Frodsham began offering his son's sexual services to other men. "Makes me throw up thinking about it," Ryan said.

In his lawsuit, Ryan Frodsham said the state was informed that David and Barbara Frodsham were physically abusing their children "by slapping them in the face, pinching them, hitting them with a wooden spoon, putting hot sauce in their mouths, pulling them by the hair, bending their fingers back to inflict pain, forcing them to hold cans with their arms extended for long periods time," and refusing to let them use the bathroom unless the door remained open. In his AP interview, Ryan said Barbara never sexually abused him but walked into the room where David was abusing him at least twice.

"She knew what was going on," he said.

The lawsuits and related legal filings also say investigators with the Department of Child Safety and case workers with Catholic Community Services, which subcontracts foster and adoption work from the state, failed to effectively follow up on 19 complaints and attempted complaints regarding the Frodsham home spanning more than a decade.

The complaints began in 2002, when the Frodshams applied for their foster care license, and continued until 2015, when David Frodsham was charged with disorderly conduct and driving drunk with children in his car, prompting the state to suspend their license indefinitely and remove all foster children from their home, although the charges were later dismissed.

Five months later, the Army deployed Frodsham to Afghanistan, where he was ordered back to Arizona after only four months of service.

#### REPORTS FELL ON DEAF EARS

The lawsuits say the Frodshams' adopted children attempted to report their own physical and sexual abuse without success.

For instance, Neal Taylor's lawsuit says he attempted to report that David Frodsham was sexually abusing him in two phone calls to his case manager, both of which he placed from school.

The first time, the case manager reported the call to Neal's adoptive mother, who "interrogated" him and "proceeded to punish" him, according to his lawsuit. The second time, the case manager refused to meet with him unless he disclosed the reason for his call over the phone, because he would have had to drive 90 minutes from Tucson to Sierra Vista for a private meeting.

Ryan Frodsham's lawsuit and the related legal filings say he reported repeated alleged physical abuse by Barbara Frodsham to Sierra Vista police when he was 12 years old after running away from home. Police photographed several bruises, returned him to Barbara Frodsham, and reported the incident to the state

Department of Child Safety. Despite the photographs and a police report, a case worker who met with Ryan five weeks later found his allegations “unsubstantiated.”

Arizona Department of Child Safety spokesman Darren DaRonco declined to answer specific questions about the lawsuits. He instead sent an email outlining the state’s procedures for screening prospective foster and adoptive parents. “Despite all of these safeguards, people are sometimes able to avoid detection,” DaRonco said, “especially if a person has no prior criminal or child abuse history.”

Yet David and Barbara Frodsham have both said they were abused as minors.

In their written application to become foster parents, Barbara Frodsham indicated that neither she nor her husband had been sexually victimized. But in recent pretrial testimony for Ryan Frodsham’s lawsuit, she said she would have revealed her abuse if she had been asked by a state investigator as part of the licensing process.

David Frodsham, for his part, told a probation official after his guilty plea that he had been abused as a teenager.

Many child welfare experts believe people with a history of child sexual abuse are more likely to abuse children in their own households and should be questioned to ensure they’ve overcome their trauma before being allowed to provide foster care.

Arizona’s child welfare case workers “did not know how to interview and, therefore, they didn’t get candid answers from the Frodshams,” said Kathleen Faller, an expert witness retained in Ryan Frodsham’s lawsuit. In pretrial testimony, Faller also said the state should not have granted the Frodshams’ foster care license.

Barbara Frodsham, who divorced David following his guilty plea, did not return multiple telephone calls from the AP, and did not respond to detailed questions left on her voice mail. At the time of her husband’s sentencing, she was working at Fort Huachuca as a personnel specialist, according to law enforcement records. A spokeswoman at Fort Huachuca said she still holds the position.

Attorneys for the state and the other defendants are seeking to have the cases dismissed, based in part on state law that grants immunity to state employees for mistakes or misjudgments committed in the course of their work. The law does not provide immunity for “gross negligence,” which the Frodsham brothers and Neal Taylor are alleging.

The state also says all the complaints about the Frodsham children and the Frodsham home were properly handled.

## CHILD SEX ABUSE RING

The Frodsham case started as child sex abuse investigations often do: with an undercover Homeland Security agent lurking in a chat room favored by child pornographers. The Philadelphia-based agent, using the Kik messaging app, ran into someone calling himself “Pup Brass” who was posting videos and photos labeled “pedopicsandvidd.”

Kik offers users a degree of anonymity but it stores IP addresses, which help identify a device’s connection to the internet and can help identify the device’s owner. According to a Sierra Vista police probable cause statement, federal and local law enforcement agents using the IP address and other information — some gleaned from social media accounts — soon determined that “Pup Brass” was Sgt. Randall Bischak.

When they raided his home, seizing computers, cell phones, tablets and CDs holding child pornography, Bischak confessed that he’d been having sex with a 59-year-old man he called “Dave” and his teenage son. In at least one instance Bischak had secretly recorded the sex on video. He also told investigators that



he and Frodsham discussed having sex with small children and that Frodsham had supplied him with at least one of the “little ones.”

Thomas Ransford, who specializes in child sex abuse cases for the Sierra Vista police, was no stranger to Frodsham. In the mid-2000s, he served as a military police officer at Fort Huachuca when Frodsham was director of Training, Plans, Mobilization and Security. “So, I knew him. I was familiar with him, attended meetings with him,” Ransford recalled. He also knew that Frodsham’s foster kids were always in trouble.

When Ransford first questioned Frodsham he denied everything. “He was pompous, like he was the smartest guy in the room,” Ransford recalled. Then Ransford played the video Bischak had secretly taken of himself having three-way sex with Frodsham and his adopted son, Ryan, and Frodsham began to acknowledge his crimes.

Ryan Frodsham also initially denied his father had abused him. “Ryan appeared very defensive of his father and did not want to implicate him in any misconduct,” Ransford wrote in a probable cause statement.

But when Ransford showed him a compromising photograph seized from Bischak’s cell phone, Ryan began to open up. Over the course of several months, Ransford said, Ryan identified others he said were part of his father’s child sex abuse ring, fueling the continuing investigation.

“There’s others we’re aware of,” Ransford said. “It’s open.”

The Frodsham child sex abuse ring is part of a cluster of sex abuse cases that have come to light in Cochise County, Arizona, over the last several years, including several involving U.S. Border Patrol agents, two of whom worked at the Naco, Arizona, Border Crossing. Among them:

— John Daly III. A year ago, authorities arrested the recently retired Border Patrol agent after DNA evidence led them to suspect him in at least eight rapes, and to consider whether he is the so-called East Valley rapist, who terrorized women outside Phoenix throughout the 1990s. Prosecutors in Maricopa and Cochise counties have charged him with multiple counts of sexual assault and kidnapping. Daly, who is being held without bail, has pleaded not guilty.

— Dana Thornhill. A year ago, Thornhill was sentenced to a 40-year prison term after pleading guilty to years of sexually abusing his two children. Thornhill was charged following a stand-off with police in which he holed up in a local church. At the time, Thornhill was the chaplain at the Naco Border Crossing.

— Paul Adams. In 2017, Adams was charged with raping his two daughters, one of whom was just 6 weeks old; taking videos of the sexual assaults; and posting them on the Internet. Adams, who took his own life before standing trial, was also stationed at the Naco Border Crossing.

Ransford believes the cluster of cases should be attributed to good police work and effective prosecution, which give victims and others the confidence to report child sex abuse. “People report because they know something’s going to be done about it,” he said.

But Cadigan, the attorney representing the Frodsham brothers and Neal Taylor, wonders whether child sex abuse in southern Arizona is on the rise. “Law enforcement has been very effective, and I appreciate their efforts, but I’ve been taking these cases for 30 years and I’ve never been so busy,” she said.

#### A SCANDAL-PLAGUED DEPARTMENT

The physical and sexual abuse allegedly endured by the Frodsham brothers and Neal Taylor occurred at a time when Arizona’s child welfare system was embroiled in scandal. In 2013, officials revealed that what was then the Department of Protective Services had a backlog of more than 6,500 abuse and neglect complaints it had never investigated.

<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>The revelation prompted then-Gov. Jan Brewer to dissolve the entire department and create a new Cabinet-level office called the Department of Child Safety. “It is evident that our child welfare system is broken, impeded by years of operational failures,” said Brewer, a Republican.</p> <p>Underlying the scandal were deep budget cuts to family support services, leading to soaring abuse and neglect complaints and what an auditor general’s report would later refer to as “unmanageable workloads, staff turnover and the limited experience of some CPS supervisors and newly hired investigators.”</p> <p>In 2014, an analysis produced for the state Legislature showed that the increase in workloads in Arizona during the decade that ended in 2012 was greater than in any other state but one. It also showed that the response time for abuse and neglect complaints ballooned from 63 hours to nearly 250 hours, between 2009 and 2012.</p> <p>In its defense against Ryan Frodsham’s lawsuit, the state is trying to exclude any mention of the department’s troubled past. “There is no evidence that the types of problems that led to the dissolution of CPS has any relation to or impact on his case,” the state said in a pretrial motion.</p> <p>But David and Barbara Frodsham were licensed as foster parents in 2002, at the dawn of what was perhaps the department’s most troubled period, and formally adopted the three men going to court about a decade later, shortly before the system collapsed. “The jury is entitled to the full picture,” lawyers for Ryan Frodsham said.</p> <p>In his AP interview, Ryan Frodsham said he filed his lawsuit for one reason: “I want the state to admit what it did was wrong.”</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>03/31 NYC dozens of kids shot so far in 2022</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.foxnews.com/us/nyc-children-shootings-murders">https://www.foxnews.com/us/nyc-children-shootings-murders</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Nearly double the number of children have been shot on New York City streets in 2022 compared to the same time last year. An aunt of the city's sole 2022 child murder victim calls the startling violence trend "disgusting."</p> <p>Gisselle Muniz could have spent hours talking fondly about her 26-year-old sister, Gabrielle Muniz, and her 6-year-old niece, Rozara. Both were living in the Bronx in early March when they were stabbed to death by Gabrielle’s boyfriend, police said.</p> <p>"They were angels on earth," Muniz told Fox News Digital by phone. "They were both amazing people, and they brought a lot of happiness to a lot of people's lives."</p> <p>Muniz, who lives in Kissimmee, Florida, with her family, said she is still seeking answers regarding the senseless deaths. She remembered her sister as a kind-spirited go-getter who was preparing to graduate from pharmacology school and had hoped to become a doctor.</p> <p>Six-year-old Rozara had a knack for art and had just begun to come out of her shell before her life was senselessly cut short, the grieving aunt said.</p> <p>"It was my first time being a ‘titi’ – aunt," she added. "I had two boys, and she's like the daughter I never had."</p> <p>Rozara had celebrated her birthday just weeks before Saturday, March 5, when 34-year-old Caleb Duberry stabbed her and her mother, killing both before ending his own life, the New York Police Department said.</p> <p>The child, who loved unicorns, drawing and painting, is the only murder victim under the age of 18 so far this year, according to records provided by the NYPD.</p>

"I hope it's the last to be honest," Gisselle Muniz said. "It's just wrong."

Child murders as of March 15, 2022, were down significantly compared to the same time last year, when eight were reported killed, NYPD statistics show. But the same could not be said of child gunshot victims.

As of March 15, 24 children were shot year-to-date, compared to the 13 reported during the same period in 2021. And those statistics do not include the 3-year-old and 7-year-old girls who were wounded in shootings after Fox News Digital obtained the data.

"Disgusting," Muniz said.

Of those 24 gunshot victims reported as of mid-March, 23 involved children ages 10 to 17, while one involved a child under the age of 10.

Specifically, an 11-month-old girl was shot in the face while sitting in a parked car with her mother in the Bronx, where police believed she was caught in the crossfire of a gunfight.

The toddler and her 32-year-old mom, Miraida Gomez, were inside a vehicle parked at the intersection of East 198th Street and Valentine Avenue Jan. 19 when she was struck by a stray bullet, police have said.

Police have said the gunman was fighting with another person on the streets of the Bronx around 6:45 p.m. local time when shots rang out. The suspect could be seen on video with his gun pointed as he ran past bystanders and through the busy intersection.

In a message to Fox News Digital in February, Gomez criticized judges who feel pressured to release gun offenders and called for changes to bail laws and the prosecution of crimes.

"These judges shouldn't feel pressed to release individuals that carry a weapon, they should be pressed to charge them," Gomez said.

She added that it was "unfortunate" that crimes like the one involving her family often take place in communities of color.

"Color and race don't matter," she wrote at the time. "Our safety and right to life, liberty and justice matter. Let's work on the justice and safety for ALL people."

After the shooting, Mayor Eric Adams told reporters the baby's father pulled the car over to run into a nearby store but left when he heard "his wife screaming."

"Coming outside and seeing his wife holding his baby and a coat colored pink but stained with red blood from his child," Adams said. "It's unimaginable. It is unimaginable that this is happening in our city."

Adams said the bullet passed through the young girl's head. She was critically injured but was expected to survive.

Since March 15, at least two other children have been shot.

In the first incident, a 7-year-old girl was standing with her mother, 28, in Brooklyn shortly after 3 p.m. on March 21, when they heard shots being fired, the NYPD told Fox News Digital at the time. They left the area and made it back to their home nearby without realizing anyone was injured.

But the girl started complaining about two and a half hours later about stomach pain, the NYPD said. When the mother checked on the pain, she discovered that her daughter suffered a graze wound to the left side of her abdomen. The victim was rushed to an area hospital for treatment.

Then, on Friday, a 3-year-old girl and her father were leaving a day care in Brooklyn when the girl was shot as a gunman was targeting a different man, who was also with a young child at the time, police said.

The young girl and her dad were leaving the Brownsville day care around 6 p.m. Friday when the shooter opened fire. She was rushed to an area hospital and was expected to survive, but police are still hunting for the suspect.

Police officials later said they suspected the gunman was targeting another man who had been loading his 2-year-old child into a vehicle in the area at the time.

After the shooting, NYPD Chief of Department Kenneth Corey pleaded with the public, saying, "Enough is enough."

"When do we come together as a community, and as a city, and say enough is enough?" Corey asked during a press conference at the time. "An 11-month-old child was shot two months ago. Last week, a 7-year-old child was shot. And tonight, a 3-year-old girl leaving a day care center with her dad was shot in broad daylight."

It wasn't the first time a public official practically begged for a change.

In February, Mayor Adams addressed a different crisis involving children, specifically those who get caught up in crime at a young age. Adams was on the verge of tears as he called on New York City agencies to "do more" to prevent at-risk youth from becoming embroiled in lives of crime.

"We must step up, save the children who are falling through the cracks upstream," he said at the time. "We must rescue them before they are swept away in the rivers of violence."

As of Sunday, 312 people had been shot year-to-date in New York City, up from the 267 gunshot victims reported during the same time last year, according to NYPD statistics. Meanwhile, murders year-to-date are down compared to last year, with 93 in 2022 compared to the 98 in 2021.

Carlos Velasquez, president of the New York City Police Athletic League (PAL), told Fox News Digital there is "more of a need" now for youth enrichment in the Big Apple than there might have been in past years, noting that people today are "battling with a lot of different forces."

"In the '80s and '90s, you might have battled with video games. We didn't have the internet," he said. "You didn't have social media. You didn't have the pressure to prove yourself in a way where the world is watching. You didn't have to worry about someone bullying you, where thousands of people, maybe hundreds of people could come and see it every day."

PAL offers services and programs for young people to foster their interests and build relationships with police officers. It provides children with opportunities to enjoy sports, arts and other pastimes to "find somewhat of a passion or something to commit to," Velasquez said.

"It seems like dangers are lurking around every corner right now for some of our young people, so that the toll on their mental health on all of our mental health is extreme right now," Velasquez said. "That is probably one of the biggest issues that our young people are dealing with."

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HEADLINE	03/30 El Salvador declares 'state of emergency'
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/30/el-salvador-bukele-state-emergency-homicides/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/30/el-salvador-bukele-state-emergency-homicides/</a>
GIST	El Salvador's Legislative Assembly approved a state of emergency Sunday that was requested by President Nayib Bukele in response to a spike in homicides allegedly committed by gangs, a move that worries human rights groups who see the measure as an opportunity for Bukele's government to trample individual liberties.

The state of emergency declaration comes as the Central American country registered a strong uptick in homicides: 14 on Friday and 62 on Saturday, the latter one of the highest in recent years.

The [state of emergency](#), which was approved for 30 days, suspends four basic individual rights enshrined in the country's Constitution: freedom of assembly; the right to a state-sponsored legal defense upon detention; the inviolability of correspondence and communications, as authorities will be able to intercept communications without a court order; and the period of administrative detention, which is now extended beyond 72 hours.

Article 29 of the country's Constitution establishes that the state of emergency can be declared in "cases of war, invasion of territory, rebellion, sedition, catastrophe, epidemic and other general calamities, or severe disturbances of the public order," and it can be extended past 30 days.

U.N. Secretary General António Guterres expressed concern over the spike in violence in the country and said he "trusts that the measures that will be adopted in response will be in line with international human rights law and standards," according to a [news release](#).

Human Rights Watch said in a news release published Tuesday that the "[broad](#)" [state of emergency declaration](#) opens the door to abuse by the government.

"The government should address gang violence and Salvador, but it should do it in a rights-respecting way. And instead of protecting the people through the state of emergency, which is extremely broad, they're just putting their rights at risk and we see the consequences with these roundups," said Tamara Taraciuk Broner, acting Americas director at Human Rights Watch.

The Salvadoran president [tweeted Wednesday](#) that "2,163 gang members had been detained in 4 days." Police raids and detentions have intensified since the approval of the state of emergency Sunday, according to [El Salvador's La Prensa Gráfica](#). Bukele and his supporters have rejected criticism from international organizations.

Late Saturday, Bukele [asked the Legislative Assembly](#) on Twitter to approve a state of emergency. The assembly met during an extraordinary session at 11 p.m. that night. The [state of emergency was approved](#) with 67 votes out of a total of 84.

Bukele has a majority in the Legislative Assembly and has [recently removed the country's attorney general from office along with five Supreme Court judges](#), which caused concern among U.S. officials. "El Salvador has virtually no independent institutions left as a check on executive power," Human Rights Watch said in its release.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Group: police kill 3 people a day</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/30/us-police-killing-people-high-rates">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/30/us-police-killing-people-high-rates</a>
GIST	<p>Police officers in America continue to kill people at an alarming rate, according to a data analysis that has raised concerns about the Biden administration's push to expand police investments amid growing concerns about crime.</p> <p>Law enforcement in the US have killed 249 people this year as of 24 March, averaging about three deaths a day and mirroring the deadly force <a href="#">trends of recent years</a>, according to <a href="#">Mapping Police Violence</a>, a non-profit research group. The data, experts say, suggests in the nearly two years since George Floyd's murder, the US has made little progress in preventing deaths at the hands of law enforcement, and that the 2020 promises of systemic reforms have fallen short.</p> <p>Police have killed roughly 1,100 people each year since 2013. In 2021, officers killed 1,136 people – <a href="#">one of the deadliest years</a> on record, Mapping Police Violence reported. The organization tracks deaths</p>

recorded by police, governments and the media, including cases where people were fatally shot, beaten, restrained, and Tasered. The Washington Post has reported similar trends, and found that 2021 broke the record for [fatal shootings](#) by officers since the newspaper started its database tracking in 2015.

“The shocking regularity of killings suggests that nothing substantive has really changed to disrupt the nationwide dynamic of police violence,” said Samuel Sinyangwe, a data scientist and policy analyst who founded Mapping Police Violence and [Police Scorecard](#), which evaluates departments. “It demonstrates that we’re not doing enough, and if anything, it appears to be getting slightly worse year over year.”

Advocates argue that the persistent rate of killings was a critical reason the US should not be expanding its police forces.

Joe Biden, who has repeatedly [said](#) to “fund the police”, [released a budget proposal](#) earlier this week for \$30bn in [law enforcement](#) and crime prevention efforts, including funding to put “more police officers on the beat”. The proposal, which called for the expansion of “accountable, community policing”, sparked immediate criticisms from racial justice groups. The Movement for Black Lives noted that the White House was proposing only \$367m to [support police reform](#) and said Biden’s budget “shows a blatant disregard for his promises to Black people, masked as an effort to decrease crime”.

Michael Gwin, a White House spokesperson, said in an email that Biden had been “consistent in his opposition to defunding the police and in his support for additional funding for community policing”, and “remains committed to advancing long-overdue police reforms”.

“The president, along with the overwhelming majority of Americans, knows that we can and must have a criminal justice system that both protects public safety and upholds our founding ideals of equal treatment under the law. In fact, those two goals go hand-in-hand. That approach is at the core of the president’s comprehensive plan to combat crime by getting guns off the streets, and by investing in community-oriented policing and proven community anti-violence programs,” he added.

During the national uprisings after Floyd’s murder, “defund the police” became a [central rallying cry](#), with advocates arguing [reform efforts had failed](#) to prevent killings and misconduct. Cities could save lives by reducing police budgets, limiting potentially deadly encounters with civilians, and reinvesting funds into community programs that address root causes of crime, activists have said.

Some cities initially responded with modest [cuts to police budgets](#), in some cases removing officers from schools, traffic enforcement and other divisions, and investing in alternatives. But over the last year, an uptick in gun violence and homicides has prompted a backlash to the idea of defunding (even as the current crime rate remains significantly lower than decades prior). With intense media coverage of crime, officials have been pressured to [abandon reforms](#), prioritize harsh punishments and invest more in police. Cities that made small cuts have largely [restored and expanded](#) law enforcement budgets.

“To invest more into a system that we all know is broken is really a slap in the face to everyone who marched in summer 2020,” said Chris Harris, director of policy at the Austin Justice Coalition in Texas. “It reflects just a real lack of solutions to the problems that we face. It’s just more of the same – even if it’s exactly the thing that we know continues to hurt and kill people.”

Harris said it was disappointing to see calls for police expansion at the federal level, given the [George Floyd Act](#), the national reform measure proposed after the protests, did not succeed. He said he was not surprised that the killings by police continue apace: “We fail to deal with the underlying issues that often drive police interactions in our communities, partly because we’re funding this law enforcement response rather than the upfront supports and services that could help people.”

Gwin noted that the White House was exploring possible executive action to pass reforms after Republicans blocked negotiations over legislation.

Sinyangwe pointed to a [data analysis](#) in Los Angeles, which showed that in recent years, one-third of incidents in which Los Angeles police department (LAPD) officers used force involved an unhoused person: “Instead of using force against homeless people, we should be investing in services and creating unarmed civilian responses to these issues.”

But in LA, where housing and outreach efforts have [fallen short](#), there has been an escalating law enforcement [crackdown on street encampments](#). And LAPD is [on track to get a large budget boost](#), despite a [sharp increase in killings](#) by officers in 2021.

Proponents of police budget increases argue that law enforcement is the solution to violence, but Sinyangwe noted that [fewer than 5% of arrests](#) nationally are for serious violent crimes. And [research has shown](#) that when police forces expand, there are more [arrests](#) for low-level offenses, he said. And many high-profile killings by police have involved stops for alleged [low-level crimes](#).

Kaitlyn Dey, an organizer in Portland, Oregon, said it was frustrating to see officials push a narrative that cities need to “re-fund the police” when municipalities have largely failed to defund law enforcement in the first place.

“We have to start chipping away at how many officers there are, what kind of equipment they have – that is going to reduce [police] violence, because they’re not going to be able to enact it if you take away their resources,” she said.

There are documented solutions that could reduce killings, said Alex S Vitale, sociology professor at Brooklyn College and an expert on policing. He noted [estimates](#) suggesting that 25% to 50% of people [killed by police](#) were having a mental health crisis.

“If we would develop non-police mental health crisis teams, and improve community-based mental health services, we could save hundreds of lives a year,” he said.

Vitale, author of *The End of Policing*, pointed to a program in Denver that sends mental health clinicians and paramedics to respond to certain 911 calls, which is now [dramatically expanding](#) after a successful pilot. Health experts have responded to thousands of emergency calls since 2020, and have never had to call police for backup, the [Denver Post reported](#).

“While the media has mobilized crime panics to try and shut down talk of reducing our reliance on policing, organizations across the country are doing grassroots work in communities to demand these alternatives,” he said.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Gov. blocks Manson follower parole</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/30/leslie-van-houten-gavin-newsom-denied-parole-again">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/30/leslie-van-houten-gavin-newsom-denied-parole-again</a>
GIST	<p>The California governor, Gavin Newsom, on Tuesday blocked parole for Charles Manson follower Leslie Van Houten, reversing a panel’s recommendation that she be freed after spending a half-century in prison.</p> <p>Van Houten, 72, “currently poses an unreasonable danger to society if released from prison at this time”, Newsom said in his parole review. It was the fifth time that a California governor has rejected her release.</p> <p>Her attorney, Rich Pfeiffer, disputed that view and said the decision will be appealed in court. He accused Newsom of rejecting parole because he is worried about “his political future” and noted that Van Houten has a spotless prison disciplinary record.</p> <p>“We’re not fighting [over] Leslie being a good person. She’s proven that through her actions for half a century,” he said.</p>



Van Houten is serving a life sentence for helping Manson and others kill Los Angeles grocer Leno LaBianca and his wife, Rosemary, in August 1969. Van Houten was 19 when she and other cult members fatally stabbed the LaBiancas and smeared the couple's blood on the walls.

The day before, other Manson followers, not including Van Houten, killed pregnant actor Sharon Tate and four others.

In his rejection letter, Newsom noted that Van Houten had undergone therapy, earned educational degrees and taken self-help classes in prison and had shown "increased maturity and rehabilitation".

But Van Houten also has "gaps in insight" that continue to make her a danger to society, Newsom said.

Van Houten has had 21 parole hearings since 1982. Most parole boards denied her bid for freedom. But five panels have recommended her release since 2016, saying she had expressed remorse and was no longer a threat to public safety.

Newsom rejected a recommendation made last November.

He previously reversed parole recommendations in 2019 and 2020. In February, the California supreme court refused to hear Van Houten's appeal of the 2020 rejection.

The previous governor of California, Jerry Brown, rejected Van Houten's parole in 2016 and 2018.

Manson died in 2017 of natural causes at a California hospital while serving a life sentence.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Ex-chief Canada military pleads guilty</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/canada/jonathan-vance-guilty-obstruction.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/world/canada/jonathan-vance-guilty-obstruction.html</a>
GIST	<p>OTTAWA — Canada's former top military commander pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice on Wednesday in connection with a military police investigation into allegations that he engaged in sexual misconduct while leading the country's military.</p> <p>Jonathan Vance, the former chief of the defense staff, is one of several current and former Canadian military commanders under investigation for sexual impropriety. The growing scandal has undermined public confidence in Canada's military.</p> <p>"This is as low as it gets," said Michel Drapeau, a former Canadian military officer who now teaches law at the University of Ottawa. "It raised serious apprehension as to how did this guy go so far and stay in position for five years given what we've come to know."</p> <p>Mr. Vance, 58, became the first former or current top military commander ever to face criminal charges last year when military police made the obstruction charge which, in an unusual move, was referred to the civilian justice system for prosecution. Several military law experts said that it is not possible to prosecute current or former chiefs of the defense staff under the military system.</p> <p>It is unclear when the military police began investigating Mr. Vance. But the obstruction of justice charge involved events in February, 2021, a month after the general retired as long planned.</p> <p>In court documents, the military police charged that Mr. Vance, a retired general, "willfully" attempted to obstruct justice when he repeatedly telephoned Maj. Kellie Brennan and attempted to persuade her to give false statements to investigators. Major Brennan has identified herself in media interviews and before parliament as one of the people who made complaints against Mr. Vance. She testified before a parliamentary committee that Mr. Vance is the father of two of her eight children.</p>

When Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appointed Anita Anand as defense minister late last year, he made one of her top priorities dealing with the expanding list of elite military officers facing sexual misconduct allegations.

Mr. Vance's immediate successor as chief of the defense staff, Adm. Art McDonald, went on leave last year when he became the subject of a separate misconduct inquiry. In August, after the military police said it was not bringing any criminal or disciplinary charges against the admiral, the government began its own review. Ms. Anand announced in late November that he had been fired.

Two independent reviews have found that the Canadian military is rife with sexual harassment. And in 2019 the government set aside about \$690 million to settle claims of sexual harassment and misconduct within its military that were brought in five class-action lawsuits.

Many current and former senior Canadian military leaders facing sexual misconduct allegations have been investigated, suspended, charged under criminal laws or retired early. They include Vice-Admiral Haydn Edmundson, the military's former head of human resources, who was charged in December with sexual assault and committing indecent acts. He has denied any wrongdoing.

Mr. Drapeau, who also represents military sexual assault victims, said that the situation is making it difficult for the military to recruit and retain members. It also, he added, should lead to a review of how senior officers are appointed, a process over which currently the civilian government has little control.

'We've allowed the system, over decades, to produce this sort of results,' Mr. Drapeau said. 'Just the sheer number of general officers who have been seeing it across here is cause for concern.'

He said that because Canada's military code of conduct, unlike those of many other countries including the United States, does not ban consenting relations between senior and lower-ranked officers, he does not anticipate that Mr. Vance will face any charges directly related to sexual misconduct. But, he said, it is possible that Mr. Vance, who led Canada's forces in Afghanistan, may be stripped of his military honors.

After Mr. Vance entered a guilty plea before the Ontario Court of Justice, he was granted a conditional discharge which will spare him a criminal record on those charges. He was sentenced to 12 months probation and 80 hours of community service.

The court also ordered him not to have any contact with Major Brennan outside of family law proceedings related to one of the children he fathered with her.

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HEADLINE	03/30 DOJ substantially widens Jan 6 inquiry
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/us/politics/justice-dept-widens-jan-6-inquiry.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/us/politics/justice-dept-widens-jan-6-inquiry.html</a>
GIST	<p>Federal prosecutors have substantially widened their Jan. 6 investigation to examine the possible culpability of a broad range of figures involved in former President Donald J. Trump's efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election, people familiar with the inquiry said on Wednesday.</p> <p>The investigation now encompasses the possible involvement of other government officials in Mr. Trump's attempts to obstruct the certification of President Biden's Electoral College victory and the push by some Trump allies to promote slates of fake electors, they said.</p> <p>Prosecutors are also asking about planning for the rallies that preceded the assault on the Capitol, including the rally on the Ellipse on Jan. 6 of last year, just before a pro-Trump mob stormed the Capitol.</p> <p>The federal investigation initially focused largely on the rioters who had entered the Capitol, an effort that has led to more than 700 arrests. But the Justice Department appears to have moved into a new phase, seeking information about people more closely tied to Mr. Trump. This development comes amid growing political pressure on Attorney General Merrick B. Garland to move more aggressively on the case.</p>

A grand jury sitting in Washington is investigating the rallies that preceded the storming of the Capitol, a person familiar with the matter said.

One of the subpoenas, which was reviewed by The New York Times, sought information about people “classified as VIP attendees” at Mr. Trump’s Jan. 6 rally.

It also sought information about members of the executive and legislative branches who had been involved in the “planning or execution of any rally or any attempt to obstruct, influence, impede or delay” the certification of the 2020 election.

And it asked about the effort by Trump supporters to put forward alternate slates of electors as Mr. Trump and his allies were seeking to challenge the certification of the Electoral College outcome by Congress on Jan. 6.

Another person briefed on the grand jury investigation said at least one person involved in the logistics of the Jan. 6 rally had been asked to appear.

In pursuing Jan. 6 cases, prosecutors have been assembling evidence documenting how defendants have cited statements from Mr. Trump to explain why they stormed the Capitol. And prosecutors have cited in some cases a Twitter post from Mr. Trump weeks before Jan. 6 exhorting his followers to come to Washington, a call that [motivated extremist groups](#) in particular.

The expanded criminal inquiry is unfolding as a separate investigation by the House select committee on the Capitol riot is gathering evidence about Mr. Trump’s efforts to hold onto power and weighing the possibility of making a criminal referral of Mr. Trump to the Justice Department.

On Monday, a federal judge in California, in a civil case involving the House committee, concluded that Mr. Trump likely [engaged in criminal conduct](#), including obstructing the work of Congress and conspiring to defraud the United States.

Mr. Garland has given little public indication of whether the Justice Department would consider prosecuting Mr. Trump, saying only that the department will follow the facts wherever they lead.

But the expanded inquiry, elements of which were [reported](#) earlier by the Washington Post, suggests that prosecutors are pursuing a number of lines of inquiry. Those include any connections between the attack on the Capitol and the organizers and prominent participants in the rally on the Ellipse, and potential criminality in the promotion of pro-Trump slates of electors to replace slates named by states won by Mr. Biden.

The Justice Department [previously said](#) it was looking into the slates of electors that had falsely declared Mr. Trump the victor in seven swing states won by Mr. Biden.

Even as election officials in the seven contested states sent official lists of electors who had voted for Mr. Biden to the Electoral College, the fake slates claimed Mr. Trump was the winner in an apparent bid to subvert the election outcome.

Lawmakers, state officials and the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 riot had asked the Justice Department to look into the role played by those fake electors and the documents they submitted to the National Archives on Dec. 14, 2020. The grand jury subpoenas suggest that prosecutors are seeking to gather evidence of whether submitting the documents to a federal agency amounted to a crime.

Allies of Mr. Trump had been thinking about trying to [put in place](#) their own slates of electors at least as far back as 15 days after Election Day. The House select committee is also [investigating](#) the fake electors scheme.

The House committee's investigators, like the federal prosecutors, have also been interested in the planning and financing of the Jan. 6 rally on the Ellipse and key figures involved in it. Ali Alexander, a prominent figure in the pro-Trump "Stop the Steal" movement and an organizer of the rally, has been [cooperating with the House committee](#). Mr. Alexander marched to the Capitol from the rally with Alex Jones, the conspiracy theorist and Infowars host.

The House panel has also been seeking information from Amy Kremer, the chairwoman of Women for America First, which helped plan the rally.

The committee has also sent subpoenas seeking information from Katrina Pierson, Mr. Trump's former national campaign spokeswoman; Kylie Jane Kremer, the daughter of Amy Kremer and the director of Women for America First; Lyndon Brentnall, the owner of a Florida-based security company who was the "on-site supervisor" for the rally; Maggie Mulvaney, a niece of the former top Trump aide Mick Mulvaney who is listed on the permit for the event; Megan Powers, an operations manager; and Tim Unes, whose company was listed as the stage manager for the gathering.

The criminal charges against rioters so far have ranged from misdemeanors to obstructing Congress in its duty to certify the Electoral College result. The committee has also lodged conspiracy charges against leaders of two of the extremist groups who figured prominently in the Capitol attack, the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys.

Enrique Tarrio, the former leader of the Proud Boys, was [charged](#) this month with conspiring with other top lieutenants of the far-right nationalist group to disrupt the certification of the election.

In January, prosecutors charged Stewart Rhodes, the founder and leader of the Oath Keepers militia, with [seditious conspiracy](#) for what the government has described as a plot to violently disrupt the work of Congress.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Man admits: premeditated, barbaric killing</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/man-admits-to-barbaric-murder-after-inviting-woman-to-shoreline-home-for-movie-night-police-say">https://www.q13fox.com/news/man-admits-to-barbaric-murder-after-inviting-woman-to-shoreline-home-for-movie-night-police-say</a>
GIST	<p><b>SHORELINE, Wash.</b> - A <a href="#">Shoreline</a> man turned himself in to police after allegedly inviting a woman over with the intent to kill her and then bludgeoning her to death, according to court documents. He also admitted to using meth and staying awake for four days before the horrific crime.</p> <p>On March 27 around 7 a.m., police were called to an apartment building in the <a href="#">17500 block of Linden Ave. N</a>. The dispatcher told police, "the murder was on my account... I murdered her."</p> <p>When officers arrived, they found the caller, later identified as 41-year-old Tyrone Wells, <a href="#">had blood visible on him</a>.</p> <p>Wells was detained and police entered the apartment unit address he provided, where they found a woman, identified as 32-year-old Randee Rios, <a href="#">face down with "major trauma to the head."</a></p> <p>While being questioned by detectives, Wells said he hit Rios with a hatchet, bongo drums and a large bolt cutter. He said he invited her over with the intention of killing her, and woke her up after she fell asleep so she "would know what was happening to her," court documents detail.</p> <p>He also <a href="#">admitted to detectives</a> that he uses meth and had been up for more than four days before committing the murder. He said he procrastinated that whole night before deciding to go through with his initial plans, court documents say.</p> <p>Wells said he and Rios had been intimate for the last five years or so. At one point, he even asked her father to marry her, according to court documents.</p>

	<p>According to police, Wells called his mother and confessed what he did. She told him to call 911, but before he did that, he called his neighbor to smoke pot, but the neighbor wasn't home.</p> <p>Detectives said Wells smiled when he was told he would be charged with first-degree murder, particularly when a detective mentioned the element of premeditation.</p> <p>"I said that word (earlier)," Wells replied, according to court documents.</p> <p>A judge found probable cause to set Wells' bail at \$5 million.</p> <p>"Prosecutors argued that bail was justified because of the extreme violence and cruelty in this case, and because the murder was planned in an intentional way. We also argued that Mr. Wells is unlikely to return to court because he has a history of 11 warrants including three active warrants. One of those is in a misdemeanor assault case," the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Eastern WA fentanyl seizures, prosecutions</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/fentanyl-use-washington-dea-task-force/293-e01b59f3-1f80-4a59-9e6b-e6652d73e464">https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/fentanyl-use-washington-dea-task-force/293-e01b59f3-1f80-4a59-9e6b-e6652d73e464</a>
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — The United States Attorney and Assistant Attorney for Eastern Washington say fentanyl seizures and prosecutions in the area have increased more than 60% in the last two years.</p> <p>According to the federal prosecutors, the problem cannot be solved by law enforcement alone.</p> <p>Fentanyl use is surging across the country and in the Inland Northwest. As the cheaper and more powerful synthetic opioids take hold in places like Spokane, the results are often fatal.</p> <p>"In my 30 years of law enforcement experience, I've never seen something so deadly," Assistant U.S. Attorney for Eastern Washington Stephanie Van Marter said.</p> <p>Fentanyl first appeared in Eastern Washington in 2016 and has quickly flooded the market, according to U.S. Attorney for Eastern Washington Vanessa Waldref.</p> <p>"We have been just over the last several years seeing a huge influx of fentanyl coming into our community," she said.</p> <p>Van Marter said a 1,000 pill seizure was considered a significant seizure several years ago. Today, however, law enforcement officials are seizing anywhere between 10,000-50,000 pills at a time.</p> <p>"The reason that is so frightening is that those fentanyl-laced pills are getting into every aspect of our community," Van Marter said. "Our community needs to know that they exist and you are correct, one pill can kill and they look safe."</p> <p>Waldref and Van Marter said fentanyl pills are commonly made to look benign, in some cases like baby aspirin, but their contents are unregulated and a single pill can be lethal.</p> <p>"If you took a sugar packet and you opened it up and spread it across the table, and you separated five to seven granules of that sugar packet, that could be sufficient to cause a fatal overdose," Van Marter said. "If we are dealing with a more synthesized fentanyl, like Carfentanil, you're talking about one to two granules, that could cause a fatal overdose."</p> <p>Waldref's office is prioritizing prosecuting fentanyl cases by targeting the cartels flooding the United States with the drugs, which are commonly trafficked up I-5 and across Interstate 90.</p>

	<p>Van Marter and Waldref announced Operation Engage on Tuesday in coordination with the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) to increase public awareness about the growing prevalence of fentanyl.</p> <p>The federal prosecutors are also pleading with parents to talk to their children about the risks of fentanyl.</p> <p>"As law enforcement leaders, we see this as a huge issue and are doing all we can," Waldref said. "But also as mothers and parents, this is something that I worry about for my children and I want to do all that we can to educate our community about these dangers."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Violent crime Seattle's Ballard area up</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/very-unusual-disconcerting-violent-crime-up-ballard-neighborhood/GZHLIWZALVFDJGZ5AB5L452NE4/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/very-unusual-disconcerting-violent-crime-up-ballard-neighborhood/GZHLIWZALVFDJGZ5AB5L452NE4/</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Violent crime in Seattle's Ballard neighborhood is up, according to the latest Seattle police data from its crime dashboard. But the latest numbers don't even capture the recent string of shootings in about a half-mile area of Ballard in March.</p> <p>There have been at least four recent shooting incidents, with three that ended with someone shot. Meanwhile, businesses are also coping with property crime.</p> <p>Here are a list of recent shooting incidents:</p> <p><a href="#">3/28</a>: 14th Avenue Northwest and Northwest Leary Way — 53-year-old man shot in abdomen</p> <p><a href="#">3/22</a>: 17th Avenue Northwest and Northwest 53rd Street — 39-year-old man shot in neck</p> <p><a href="#">3/20</a>: Eighth Avenue Northwest and Northwest 47th Street — drive-by shooting, no one hurt</p> <p><a href="#">2/15</a>: 15th Avenue Northwest and Northwest Leary Way — man shot in hip</p> <p>"Gun violence in Ballard? It's very, very unusual and disconcerting," said Shawn Telford, a Ballard resident.</p> <p>People in the neighborhood say it seems like something has changed recently.</p> <p>"The vibe is absolutely different in every way," said James Callaghan, who said he has lived in the neighborhood for 40 years.</p> <p>It has some wondering if a police crackdown on crime in downtown Seattle at Third and Pine and the Little Saigon neighborhood is pushing illegal activity to other areas.</p> <p>"Definitely it feels like a new element has moved into the neighborhood. It's been not that great for a while, but it's a lot less than not that great now," Callaghan said.</p> <p>In an email, Jamie Housen, spokesperson for Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell, said gun violence data is being monitored.</p> <p>"The City is tracking crime data on a regular basis and at a granular level, but would not draw a link between crime and gun violence from other parts of the City and Ballard without more evidence. As we track crime and gun violence, we will deploy emphasis patrols, activate gun violence prevention efforts, and prioritize areas most impacted, including Ballard, in our work moving forward," Housen said.</p> <p>Violent crime data from the Seattle Police website shows the number of violent crime incidents for January and February of 2022 have reached 42 cases. That's the highest number of violent crimes for this two-month time frame in at least 14 years, or the furthest back SPD data is readily available.</p> <p>Neighbors say it means they're being a lot more cautious.</p>



“Even short trips to the grocery store I’m going to take my car — because if I have my kid, I don’t know. Our town just doesn’t feel very safe,” Telford said.

Meanwhile, businesses are also continuing to struggle with property crime.

Begin” is a new handmade jewelry shop on Ballard Avenue. They opened up six months ago, but just this month they’ve dealt with multiple break-ins.

“We had four incidents in three weeks, so it was like one thing after another,” said MK Byrne, the store owner.

In the most recent incident last week, the shop had a window cracked. Byrne decided to stay at her shop overnight to keep guard.

“I was really angry and spent the night here with my dog in the store. And it was early in the morning about 5 a.m., and someone came in broke the window,” Byrne said.

Surveillance video Byrne shared showed the moment a man crawled through the window and started grabbing merchandise. Byrne decided to face the thief herself, with her dog at her side.

“We chased them out just by throwing things, and they left without taking very much,” Byrne said. She said as a new business, a serious loss of inventory could shut them down for good.

“For me, this is something that’s so precious, sacred, and such an incredible opportunity. I put everything I have into protecting it and making sure that we can do this,” Byrne said.

Despite all the recent challenges, businesses and people say they are still hopeful.

“I feel really supported and I’m really in a community that’s invested in it’s future,” Byrne said.

“I think it’s too early to tell really. But that being said, I really admire this mayor’s stance on these issues. Seems to be taking it much more seriously and proactively than we’ve seen in the recent past,” Telford said.

Councilmember Dan Strauss, who represents the Ballard area, said he’s working with the mayor and city attorney’s to respond to this area seeing more gun violence with “every resource available.”

The mayor’s office said a representative will be meeting with Ballard businesses later this week.

Mayor Harrell’s office also said in a statement:

“Mayor Harrell believes that small businesses deserve support, safety, and peace of mind, and that continued crime and gun violence are unacceptable. The mayor is working every day to develop and implement comprehensive, sustainable, and multi-faceted public safety strategies that serve neighborhoods in need.”

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Judge orders Everett cop killer to court</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Man-refuses-court-in-off-duty-Seattle-area-17041784.php">https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Man-refuses-court-in-off-duty-Seattle-area-17041784.php</a>
GIST	<p>LAS VEGAS (AP) — A judge in Las Vegas has ordered an accused killer to be brought to court to face a murder charge in the fatal stabbing of an off-duty Seattle-area police officer last weekend on the Las Vegas Strip.</p> <p>Officials said Wednesday that Freddy Allen refused to be brought to court from the Clark County Detention Center, where he is being held without bail after also refusing transport to court on Monday.</p>



	<p>Justice of the Peace Harmony Letizia ordered Allen brought to court on Monday “by any means necessary.”</p> <p>His appointed public defense attorney, Melissa Oliver, declined after the brief court appearance to comment on Allen's behalf.</p> <p>Allen is accused of killing Tyler Steffins, 33, an Edmonds, Washington, police officer who was visiting Las Vegas, following an argument late March 26 about Steffins petting another man’s dogs on a casino-to-casino pedestrian bridge over Las Vegas Boulevard.</p> <p>Las Vegas police said Steffins was not armed and officers who chased Allen saw him toss a hunting knife into a fountain, where it was retrieved following his arrest.</p> <p>Court records show that Allen was released from jail in February after serving a 90-day sentence for his guilty plea to misdemeanor battery following his arrest last November in an attack on a man on the Strip.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Gunmen attack train near Nigeria capital</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/business-africa-nigeria-abuja-69bc0059c71b9b9823a094ea75bb9904">https://apnews.com/article/business-africa-nigeria-abuja-69bc0059c71b9b9823a094ea75bb9904</a>
GIST	<p>ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Gunmen attacked a train near Nigeria’s capital on Monday night with explosives and gunfire, killing an unspecified number of the nearly 1,000 passengers on board, authorities and survivors told The Associated Press on Tuesday.</p> <p>The attackers used explosives to first blow up the rail track before opening fire on the train near Abuja in northwest Nigeria, according to Fidete Okhiria, chief executive of the state-owned Nigerian Railway Corporation. Many people are also feared to have been abducted during the “unprecedented” attack, he said.</p> <p>Authorities could not immediately confirm the number of passengers on the train but local media reported that nearly 1,000 were on board. “There were casualties but we have not been able to confirm the number,” said Okhiria, calling the attack a major setback. It is the latest in a series of other train attacks.</p> <p>Abdulwadud Ahmad, a survivor, said he knew of nine passengers killed including someone sitting close to him.</p> <p>“They bombed the track and started exchanging fire with the security inside the train,” he told the AP. “They subdued the security, then came into the train ... and kidnapped a lot of people. They killed some people intentionally while some (were killed) with stray bullets.”</p> <p>The train service is a popular route for many in Nigeria’s capital and in the neighboring Kaduna state as travelers continue to stay away from roads notorious for kidnappings.</p> <p>The attack occurred in Katari in Kaduna state, 90 kilometers (55 miles) from Nigeria’s capital, triggering fears and concerns over the safety of Abuja.</p> <p>No group has claimed responsibility for the attack but suspicion quickly fell on the armed groups who have carried out thousands of abductions and killings in the northwest and central states of the West African nation.</p> <p>The train service on the route has been suspended with immediate effect, the railway executive said, as the Nigerian military and the police continue to “comb through the areas” in search of passengers many of whom are feared to have been abducted.</p>

	<p>The state government in Kaduna — one of the states worst hit by the cycle of violence in Nigeria’s troubled northern region — said it has completed the evacuation of “trapped” passengers with help from the security forces.</p> <p>“Passengers who sustained injuries and other fatalities have been moved to hospitals,” Samuel Aruwan, the state commissioner for security said in a statement.</p> <p>He added that passengers were rescued from “different hard-to-reach areas in forests and rocky locations,” amid eyewitness accounts that some passengers escaped in the middle of the gunfire.</p> <p>There have been at least three attacks reported on the Abuja-Kaduna train service in the last year, often carried out by the armed groups in Nigeria’s troubled north whom authorities have declared terrorist organizations.</p> <p>Nigerian authorities are either under-assessing the declining security situation at hand or underrating the capability of the gunmen, said Oluwaseyi Adetayo, a security expert and former officer of the Nigerian secret police, the Department of State Services.</p> <p>“We continue to do the same thing over and over again and expect different results,” he said. “We need to develop a bigger approach rather than a quick fix.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Lynching a federal hate crime</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/biden-signs-anti-lynching-bill-hate-crimes-b477eeeda7b18bf97d20c91f4cb939ee">https://apnews.com/article/biden-signs-anti-lynching-bill-hate-crimes-b477eeeda7b18bf97d20c91f4cb939ee</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — Presidents typically say a few words before they turn legislation into law. But Joe Biden flipped the script Tuesday when it came time to put his signature on the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act.</p> <p>He signed the bill at a desk in the White House Rose Garden. Then he spoke.</p> <p>“All right. It’s law,” said the president, who was surrounded by Vice President Kamala Harris, members of Congress and top Justice Department officials. He was also joined by a descendant of Ida B. Wells, a Black journalist who reported on lynchings, and Rev. Wheeler Parker, a cousin of Till.</p> <p>Biden said it’s “a little unusual to do the bill signing, not say anything and then speak. But that’s how we set it up.”</p> <p>He thanked the audience of civil rights leaders, Congressional Black Caucus members and other guests who kept pushing for the law for “never giving up, never ever giving up.”</p> <p>Congress first considered anti-lynching legislation more than 120 years ago. Until March of this year, it had failed to pass such legislation nearly 200 times, beginning with a bill introduced in 1900 by North Carolina Rep. George Henry White, the only Black member of Congress at the time.</p> <p>Harris was a prime sponsor of the bill when she was in the Senate.</p> <p>The Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act is named for the Black teenager whose killing in Mississippi in the summer of 1955 became a galvanizing moment in the civil rights era. His grieving mother insisted on an open casket to show everyone how her son had been brutalized.</p> <p>“It’s a long time coming,” said Parker, who was onstage with Biden when the president signed the bill. Parker, two years older than Till, was with his cousin at their relatives’ home in Mississippi and witnessed Till’s kidnapping.</p>

In his remarks, Biden acknowledged the struggle to get a law on the books, and spoke about how lynchings were used to terrorize and intimidate Blacks in the United States. More than 4,400 Blacks died by lynching between 1877 and 1950, mostly in the South, he said.

“Lynching was pure terror, to enforce the lie that not everyone, not everyone belongs in America, not everyone is created equal,” he said.

Biden, who has many Black men and women in key positions throughout his administration, stressed that forms of racial terror continue in the United States, demonstrating the need for an anti-lynching statute.

“Racial hate isn’t an old problem — it’s a persistent problem,” Biden said. “Hate never goes away. It only hides.”

The new law makes it possible to prosecute a crime as a lynching when a conspiracy to commit a hate crime leads to death or serious bodily injury, according to the bill’s champion, Rep. Bobby Rush, D-Ill. The law lays out a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison and fines.

The House approved the bill 422-3 on March 7, with eight members not voting, after it cleared the Senate by unanimous consent. Rush had introduced a bill in January 2019 but it stalled in the Senate after the House passed by a vote of 410-4.

The NAACP began lobbying for anti-lynching legislation in the 1920s. A federal hate crime law was passed and signed into law in the 1990s, decades after the civil rights movement.

“Today we are gathered to do unfinished business,” Harris said, “to acknowledge the horror and this part of our history, to state unequivocally that lynching is and has always been a hate crime and to make clear that the federal government may now prosecute these crimes as such.”

“Lynching is not a relic of the past,” she added. “Racial acts of terror still occur in our nation, and when they do, we must all have the courage to name them and hold the perpetrators to account.”

Till, 14, had traveled from his Chicago home to visit relatives in Mississippi in 1955 when it was alleged that he whistled at a white woman. He was kidnapped, beaten and shot in the head. A large metal fan was tied to his neck with barbed wire and his body was thrown into a river. His mother, Mamie Till, insisted on an open casket at the funeral to show the brutality he had suffered.

Two white men, Roy Bryant and his half-brother J.W. Milam, were accused, but acquitted by an all-white-male jury. Bryant and Milam later told a reporter that they kidnapped and killed Till.

During a video interview after the bill signing, Parker credited current events for helping the anti-lynching bill move through Congress and to Biden’s desk. Parker specifically mentioned the police killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer in May 2020, which sparked months of protests in the United States and other countries after videotape of the officer’s actions circulated.

He drew a connection between Floyd and Till, saying, “That’s what caused Rosa Parks to not give her seat up and that sparked the civil rights movement, because she thought about Emmett Till.”

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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 Man gets 10yrs; violence in Oregon protests</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/man-gets-10-years-for-violent-actions-during-oregon-protests/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/man-gets-10-years-for-violent-actions-during-oregon-protests/</a>
GIST	PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — A man from Indiana accused of hurling Molotov cocktails at police in Portland, Oregon, and breaking windows during 2020 protests against police brutality was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Malik Muhammad, 25, initially faced dozens of charges in state and federal court stemming from protests he joined after traveling from Indianapolis to Portland.

He pleaded guilty to 14 felonies including attempted murder on Tuesday as part of a plea agreement, Oregon Public Broadcasting reported. Muhammad also pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court on Monday to two counts of unlawful possession of a destructive device in connection with the same protests. No additional prison time is expected in that sentencing.

He traveled to Portland from his home in Indianapolis in August 2020 to engage in violence at the city's mass protests in September and October, prosecutors said.

Muhammad was accused of throwing a Molotov cocktail that landed near a police vehicle on Sept. 5, 2020, in Southeast Portland and throwing a similar device at a line of officers downtown later that month that caught an officer's pant leg on fire, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported.

In October 2020, Muhammad is accused of smashing windows of the Oregon Historical Society and a Portland State University building with a metal baton.

Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Cheryl Albrecht called the plea agreement "a balanced, equitable result" noting prosecutors took into account mitigating information about Muhammad. Court documents say he's a U.S. Army veteran who has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder as well as bipolar disorder. At the time of the protests, Muhammad was not taking medication.

"We are dedicated as a community to not only reducing but ending, the historic repression and discrimination that has overburdened communities of color and that we are dedicated to doing so peacefully," Albrecht said.

Albrecht also sentenced Muhammad to pay \$200,000 in restitution.

Under the agreement, Muhammad will serve his sentence in an Oregon Department of Corrections prison rather than in a federal facility.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/29 WSP concern over rise highway shootings</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/troopers-very-concerned-over-rise-in-shootings-on-freeways">https://komonews.com/news/local/troopers-very-concerned-over-rise-in-shootings-on-freeways</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Washington State Patrol troopers on Tuesday were investigating another shooting on a highway in King County, raising the total so far this year to 19 such incidents, and they are now urging witnesses from several recent cases to come forward.</p> <p>The latest reported incident occurred Monday when troopers say a man was shot in his leg while driving north on Interstate 5 near the exit to the West Seattle Bridge.</p> <p>The unidentified driver is expected to survive, troopers said. His female passenger was not hurt.</p> <p>Hilda's car was shot at on March 18 while she and her daughter were driving on I-5 northbound near 272nd Street, she said. The two are both teachers and were on their way to work when they were targeted.</p> <p>"My daughter and I we were like sitting there like, 'What just happened? Was that a gunshot?'" said Hilda, who did not want her last name to be publicly disclosed out of safety concerns. "And that's when we realized my back windshield was broken. And I called 911."</p> <p>Troopers say someone in a gray vehicle that was speeding down the highway fired several shots at a white Dodge as Hilda and her daughter were innocent bystanders caught in the middle of the gunfire.</p> <p>A bullet shattered Hilda's back window and ended up lodged in the visor above her head.</p>

"If it would have been a couple of inches up, I would have got it on my head," Hilda told KOMO News Tuesday. "There's no doubt about that."

The Washington State Patrol is urging the public to come forward if they can help solve a freeway shooting.

The shooting is one of 19 that troopers have responded to on King County highways since the start of the year. That's seven more than at this point in 2021, troopers said.

On March 19, troopers say someone in a white Dodge Charger shot at a red Volkswagen in the northbound lanes of I-5 in Federal Way after cutting the driver off.

"It's very concerning," Trooper Rick Johnson said. "I mean you look at comparatively from last year, and I haven't gone back to 2020, but it's concerning to us because our job is to keep the freeway system safe."

Some of the cases are likely the result of road rage, but it's difficult to know why they're happening, Johnson added.

"We want them all to stop, obviously," he said. "But our detectives are investigating every one of them and that's why we need the public's help."

It's something Hilda wants, too.

She and her daughter want answers about who was responsible and why to help give them some sense of closure.

"Where do we go? How do we get out of this emotional state?" Hilda said. "And what upsets me the most is this person, you know, they did what they did and they keep living. There's no remorse and yet we're stuck here."

The shooter involved in Hilda's case has not yet been identified.

Anyone with information was asked to contact Detective Ford with the Washington State Patrol by email at Brody.Ford@wsp.wa.gov

Troopers have not yet determined if any of the highway shootings that have happened in King County this year are connected.

Troopers have also seen a rise in highway shootings in Pierce and Thurston counties this year compared to 2021, and 14 have been reported so far this year. There were 10 at this point last year, troopers said.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/30 Bellevue PD: Craigslist moving scammers</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/bellevue-police-warn-of-craigslist-moving-scammers-who-hold-your-items-for-ransom">https://komonews.com/news/local/bellevue-police-warn-of-craigslist-moving-scammers-who-hold-your-items-for-ransom</a>
GIST	<p>BELLEVUE, Wash. – Police are warning residents as a moving scam seems to be making its way through the area.</p> <p>The Bellevue Police Department (BPD) said the scam originates on Craigslist for Puget Sound residents. A “company” claims to be a reputable business with a license, address and phone number.</p> <p>However, once your items are in their moving truck, you’re threatened to pay up. BPD said they will hold your things for ransom, demanding up to four or five times the original agreement amount.</p>

	<p>One victim refused to pay and lost \$40,000 in property, according to BPD.</p> <p>Police offered multiple tips on identifying this scam and others like it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid businesses or doing business solely on the internet.</li> <li>• Get multiple estimates, especially if the price is unusually low.</li> <li>• Verify credentials through the <a href="#">Utilities and Transportation Commission</a>, <a href="#">Movers</a> or the <a href="#">Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration</a>.</li> <li>• Do lengthy research.</li> </ul>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>03/29 Pot shop robberies 'public safety crisis'</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://patch.com/washington/seattle/spike-pot-shop-robberies-massive-public-safety-crisis-lcb">https://patch.com/washington/seattle/spike-pot-shop-robberies-massive-public-safety-crisis-lcb</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>OLYMPIA, WA — A recent spike in pot shop robberies has the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (LCB) warning of a "massive public safety crisis," and has lawmakers and store owners scrambling to find new ways to protect retail workers and customers alike.</p> <p>In the first few months of 2022 alone, Washington has seen over 70 robberies at cannabis retail stores, said David Postman, Chair of the LCB Board. For comparison, there were fewer than 50 robberies in all of 2021.</p> <p>"We could be approaching one a day," Postman said.</p> <p>Some robberies have turned violent, including a recent spate of robberies which caused three deaths within just four days earlier this month.</p> <p>The Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board held a roundtable meeting Tuesday, bringing together pot shop owners and state lawmakers to discuss potential solutions to the crisis. The meeting opened with a short tribute to Jordan Brown, a 29-year-old Gig Harbor man who was killed March 20 during a robbery at Tacoma's World of Weed dispensary.</p> <p>"It's just a total shock for us, after having such a false sense of security," said World of Weed owner Alden Linn. "It's really a blow to the state, the community, the employees in the store."</p> <p>One reason pot shop stores are such a common target: they have to work in cash. Cannabis is still a Schedule I drug under the standards of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, meaning that banks could be penalized for working with weed dispensaries. Having to do all their dealings in cash, makes those stores a prime target.</p> <p>"Everybody is extremely on edge," said Jenna Rodrigues co-owner of Chehalis' Gypsy Greens. "It became not 'if this will happen to us' but 'when will this happen to us.'"</p> <p>Dockside Cannabis founder Aaron Varney took a moment Tuesday to recognize the bravery of frontline workers at cannabis retailers, who have had to endure two years of pandemic and now hurdle another threat to their health and safety.</p> <p>"It's your care and commitment to the plant and the communities you serve that keep this industry open," Varney said.</p> <p>At Tuesday's meeting, lawmakers and pot shop owners alike called on the Senate to pass the SAFE Banking Act, which would prohibit federal regulators from penalizing banks that serve legitimate retailers— opening the door for pot shops to switch to safer transactions. Unfortunately for retailers, the act has struggled in the past. The SAFE Banking Act has previously cleared the House of Representatives multiple times, with the latest passage coming this fall, but it has never managed to pass through the Senate, despite drawing broad bipartisan support.</p>



"We have to both demand that congress acts on the SAFE Banking Act, but work as if they're not going to do that," Postman said.

State Sen. Karen Keiser (D-Kent) joined the call to discuss changes that could be made at the state level, like requiring dispensaries to have two-door entry, like banks or other industries at risk of robbery. She also suggested standardized training for pot shop retail workers, and asked the LCB to contact the State Department of Labor & Industries to find an "immediate" solution.

Proposals from pot shop owners were more mixed. World of Weed's Aldon Linn suggested increased police funding, security and other deterrents against threats. Others were hoping for different solutions.

"I would rather not put more guns into an already risky situation," Varney said.

But while there may be minor disagreements about what tact to take, everyone in attendance did agree on one thing: something has to happen, soon.

"Everybody, be safe out there," Linn said.

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